

Josiah

Spalding

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DISSERTATION

ON

INFANT-BAPTISM:

IN REPLY TO THE

REV. CYPRIAN STRONG'S

SECOND INQUIRY

ON THAT SUBJECT.

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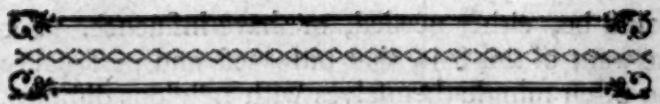


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A DISSERTATION, &c.

SECTION I.

The Question Stated.

FROM the manner and spirit with which disputes, on points of doctrine, have been too frequently managed, many have imbibed a prejudice against all controversy on religious subjects. No one, however, will question the propriety of free and candid discussion. And whenever disputes, on doctrinal points, are managed with that temper and candor, which the importance of religious subjects requires; it may be reasonably hoped that some real advantage may arise from them.

Such is the inactivity, and so great the indolence of the human mind, in the pursuit of the noblest objects, that it needs every motive, every *stimulus*, to excite it to exertion. Its powers are awakened, and its invention sharpened, by opposition. Hence, by this kind of collision of minds, new light is often struck up, and arguments produced, in support of the truth, which would otherwise have escaped observation.

Were the human mind sufficiently possessed of a spirit of benevolence and love, no other motive to an exertion of all its powers, in search after truth,

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would be, either needed, or have influence. For the want of this it is, that bitterness and personality too often mingle themselves with religious disputes. Yet, notwithstanding these unnecessary ingredients, unwelcome generally to the reader, controversial writings are, oftentimes, beneficial; and the cause of truth receives essential advantages from them.

That the import of *infant-baptism* is differently apprehended and understood, by the Rev. *Cyprian Strong* and me, is evident from our respective publications on that subject. Hence a controversy on this important point subsists between us. In this there is nothing disagreeable, excepting the want of that *single eye*, by which our bodies would be full of light; and the prejudices, each of us undoubtedly has, in favor of his own hypothesis.

In the further pursuit of this controversy, it is hoped that no personal prejudice may appear—no root of bitterness spring up: But that we shall, each of us, be willing our several arguments should be, alternately examined, with the utmost freedom; and where they are defective, their weakness be exposed.

No advances will be made towards a proper decision of the controversy between us, unless the points of difference be clearly understood. It is here, therefore, observed, that the point of difference between us, *is not the different apprehensions we, severally, entertain, either of the personal characters, or the personal rights, of infants who are the proper subjects of baptism.* The fullest evidence, that the infant-seed of believers were not heretofore to be *circumcised*, nor are now to be *baptized*, on account of any *personal right*, which they either then had, or now have, to any blessings or promises whatever, will fall greatly short of determining the true design and import of the christian institution of infant-baptism. Had nothing been denied, but *the personal rights and claims of infants*, of however eminently

pious parents they may be born, it is believed that no controversy, on the subject, would have arisen from any quarter whatever.

It is readily and fully admitted that, in all those covenant-transactions and engagements, which are entered into, on the part of man, when infants are given up to God in baptism, the *parents*, and they only, are *active*—*they only* bind themselves. The infant-seed of believers are not to be baptized, because they possess any other personal rights, than the seed of unbelievers. Nor does infant-baptism simply, in any future period, give the subject any right or authority to claim the blessings of any covenant whatever.

This notwithstanding, it is easy to see that the dedication, which a believing parent makes of his child, to God, in baptism, *may be* a compliance with some certain covenant-proposals, which God graciously makes to the parent, of the bestowment of blessings upon the child :—And, therefore, that there are in fact certain covenant-engagements, on the part of the Deity, respecting infants who are properly dedicated to him in baptism, which do not exist in regard of the seed of unbelievers.

Further ; it is neither urged, nor supposed, that God brings himself under any covenant-engagements to *the child*, which is given up to him in baptism ; or, that he makes any promises whatever, in the covenant of baptism, excepting to the parent. Yet it may be that infant-baptism is the seal of some gracious promise, on the part of God, which is made to the believing parent, respecting his child : And, that the bestowment of the blessings, contained in the covenant of promise, is suspended upon the *parent's* faithful performance of the duties to which he binds himself, when he gives up his child in baptism. It is not urged that the circumcision of infants was heretofore, or that their baptism is

now, a seal of any covenant, which God enters into *with the child*: Though the former might have been, and the latter may be, the seal of God's covenant-engagements, with the believing parent, to bless the child and to do it good.

Again; it is not, in any degree, a matter of dispute between Mr. *Strang* and me, whether believers have any peculiar encouragements to expect that God will bless their children *merely because they are their natural offspring*; or, *on the simple consideration of their being the natural seed of believers*. If the Deity give any particular encouragements, to pious and believing parents, to hope that distinguishing mercy shall be shown to their children, it must be upon some certain conditions to be complied with, and certain duties to be performed, on the part of the parent; and, not because such children are *born of believers*.

It may be proper to observe, once more, that the necessity of *real holiness and sanctification of heart*, in order to the enjoyment of God's favor, and the blessings of his kingdom, does not come into question, in the point of debate before us. That no one can have a title to the promises of God's gracious covenant, without *faith*; and, that none but *believers* have a right to plead the promises of this covenant, is, on all hands, agreed. Still, the most ample proof, that none but *believers* shall finally inherit that good, which is laid up in the promises of the new covenant, will be far from deciding the present controversy, respecting the real design and import of infant-baptism. It is easy to see that, although God offers the blessing of his favor, and eternal life, to no one, upon any condition short of repentance and faith; yet, *it may be*, that the Deity offers, to the *believing parent*, to bestow eternal blessings upon his child, upon some certain conditions to be performed by the parent; and this, as a gra-

cious reward of parental duty and faithfulness. All this, however, would not imply that *the child* could be saved without personal holiness, and a personal compliance with the proposals of the covenant of grace.

These observations may prevent the necessity of any particular remark, on many things urged, on the other side of the question, as proofs that none but *believers* are the seed, to whom the promises are made; and, that none but *such* are to inherit eternal life.

It is readily admitted that no promises are made to any, excepting believers. Yet this will not prove that God has never promised, to pious parents, that he will hear their humble and fervent prayers for their children, succeed their labors, and bless their instructions to them. It is, also, admitted that none, but believers, are that seed, who shall finally inherit eternal life. This, however, is not an evidence that God has, no where, promised, to the believing parent, that he will bestow spiritual and saving blessings upon his child. The fullest evidence, that the Deity never promised to bestow saving blessings upon any, but such as should be Abraham's spiritual seed, or his seed by faith, will fall greatly short of being a proof, that God did not promise, to this father of the faithful, that, upon his walking before him and being perfect, and commanding his children, and his household after him, he would bestow saving blessings upon his natural offspring.

The only question before us, is, *Whether infant-baptism be a seal of any covenant-promise of God respecting the child to be baptized: Or, whether it be only a seal of the parent's dedication of it to God.*

If it be true, that God has made no covenant-proposals to believing parents, respecting their children, which are acceded to by the parent, and mutually sealed, in the baptism of the infant, by the

parties in the covenant, it will be manifest that this ordinance, as it respects the infant, was never designed to be any thing more than a mark of parental dedication. Infant-baptism will then be a standing and visible testimony, that the parent dedicates, and gives up his child, to God, as he does all his other interest and property—houses, lands, and whatever else he possesses. The duty toward the child, which may flow from this dedication, may be different, in many respects, from what it will be, toward other possessions; and this, on account of the different nature of the objects. The parent will not owe, nor can he perform, all the same duties, to the brutal part of his possessions, which will be due to his children. But, after all, the baptism of an infant, however faithfully the parental duty connected with it be performed, was never designed to give, to the parent, any more assurance that God will bless his *child*, than God now gives, in the covenant of grace, that he will bless the believer, in his basket and in his store, and that he will make his cattle and his fields fruitful. Notwithstanding every thing, which is said in the holy scriptures, of God's peculiar favor to the righteous—of blessings on their seed—of their seed being known and distinguished as the seed and offspring of the righteous—of their being holy, while that of others is unclean—and, of their being of the kingdom of God: Yet, after all, the children of believers, even of such as are most eminently pious, and most distinguishingly faithful in the performance of parental duty, are left as perfectly at uncovenanted mercy, as the children of open infidels and heathen. Nor was it the design of God, to give any more assurance to the most faithful, humble, and pious parent, of saving blessings for his child, on any condition whatever to be performed by the parent, than there is, that he will bestow saving blessings upon the children of prof-

ligates and infidels :—Nor does God mean, by any thing which is said in his holy word, to minister any more ground of assured hope, that the children of pious people shall be saved, however cordially given up to him, and faithfully brought up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord ; than is given to the most careless and impious parent, that his iniquities, though he has trained up his children in the ways of sin and satan, shall not be visited upon them, and be the occasion of their final ruin.

But, if infant baptism be the seal of a covenant of promise on God's part, to the believing parent, which comprehends his child with him, on conditions to be complied with by the parent ; it will, then, appear to be something more, yea, much more, than a seal of mere parental dedication. It will appear to be a seal, on the part of God, that the blessings of that covenant of promise, on the parent's compliance with the conditions it prescribes, shall certainly be conferred on the child.

This, it is apprehended, is the true, and the only point of present controversy, on the subject of infant-baptism.

SECTION II.

On the meaning and import of the RITE of Circumcision.

AS it is admitted that baptism, under the present dispensation, takes the place of circumcision, under the former ; and, that the authority for administering it to the infant-seed of believers, is derived principally from the command originally given, to Abraham, to circumcise his male chil-

dren ; the true meaning and import of each of these rites, though differing in mode and form, must be one and the same. If the holy scriptures decide, with sufficient precision and clearness, the real design and meaning of the seal of circumcision ; the true meaning and import of the christian baptism will appear, with equal clearness. This being the case, it will easily be seen, that we shall not be able to determine, with any degree of certainty, whether infant-baptism be the seal of a covenant, on the part of God ; or, whether it be nothing more, in its original design, than a divinely instituted mark of parental dedication ; without understanding the true meaning and import of the rite of circumcision.

Mr. *Strong* says, in a note, p. 74 of his second inquiry, that “ the present inquiry does not essentially depend on its being determined, whether “ circumcision were a seal, *on the part of God and “ parents, or on the part of parents only.*” But, when it is admitted that circumcision was originally instituted as the seal of a *covenant*, it must, certainly, be of primary importance to the present controversy, to be able to determine of *what*, and of *whose* covenant it was, that circumcision was a seal. A covenant implies two, or more, parties, and mutual engagements. A seal, is an instituted sign, or token and testimony of those engagements. It cannot, therefore, be justly said, not to be essential to the present controversy, that it be determined whether circumcision were originally instituted as a seal on the part of God, as well as of parents ; or, whether it were designed as a seal on the part of parents only.

The only subject of the present debate, is, whether infant-baptism be simply *a mark of parental dedication* ; or, whether it be a seal, *on the part of God, of a covenant of promise.* If circumcision, in its ori-

ginal institution, were designed to be a mark or seal, only on the part of the parent, it will be manifest that it witnessed only parental engagements. If infant-circumcision were a witness of nothing more than the parent's engagements respecting his child, it is clearly decided that it was nothing more than a mark of parental dedication. If the *parent only* covenanted respecting the child, the circumcision of the child could be only a mark of the parent's covenant-engagements. On the other hand,

If circumcision were a seal on the part of God, it must have been the seal of a *covenant* on his part. If infant-circumcision were *God's seal*, the seal of *God's covenant*; this decides, with an equal degree of clearness, that it was something more than a mere mark of parental dedication:—Even that it was a mark of covenant-engagements on the part of God. What those engagements were, on the part of the Deity, we can learn only from the covenant itself, to which he directed his seal to be set.

In the note above referred to, it is urged that circumcision, as a seal of the covenant, respected *man only*.* As it respected adults, it is said in the text, p. 74, 75, that it “was a sign and seal of the “subject's *faith* and compliance with the covenant.” The first argument, which is urged in support of this position, is, that *man only was active in the application of the seal*. It is said that “the rainbow in the “heavens, was properly *God's seal* of the covenant: “Because it was something which he performed, in “testimony of the truth, or in confirmation of the

* It is conceded, p. 73, of the “Inquiry” before us, that the circumcision of the *parent* “was God's seal of the subject's title to eternal life.” But if by this be meant, that it was a seal of *God's promise to bestow eternal life upon the subject*; the concession is not only inconsistent with the argument urged in the note, but subversive, as is apprehended, of the sentiment, that *infant-baptism is merely a mark of parental dedication*. This may appear in the sequel.

“ declaration he had made, not to deluge the earth again. But circumcision was performed *by man*, “ in confirmation, or as a token of his compliance “ with the covenant.” All the reason, which is here suggested, in support of the opinion that circumcision was not a seal on the part of God, is, that it was not performed miraculously, or by the immediate act of God. It is true that man only was active in applying the seal. But it is equally true that it was a seal of a covenant, which promises its blessings to man, upon his compliance with the terms it proposes. When God has instituted a seal of *this covenant*, which, on man’s acceding to the terms of it, becomes mutual; though man only be active in the application of it, it will not by any just rules of reasoning, from thence follow, that it is not as much a seal, *on God’s part*, to the promises of the covenant, as it is *on man’s*, to do the duties which the covenant requires.

But it is said, further, “ that the Deity had, by “ most positive declarations, bound himself to be the “ God of Abraham and his believing seed, on the “ condition of their keeping covenant—that, as “ to God’s keeping covenant, it did not admit of a “ question: But there needed some test, or mark “ of the faithfulness, or covenant engagements of “ men.” But is it not true, that God had bound himself, *by most positive declarations to Noah*, that there should no more be a flood to destroy the earth? And, as to God’s keeping covenant *in this instance*, it no more admitted of a question, than *in the other*. Are we hence to infer, that the *rain-bow*, as a seal of God’s covenant of promise, was unnecessary and useless? If the wisdom and goodness of God directed, that there should be a seal, *on his part*, of his faithfulness to his promise in one instance, why might not the same wisdom and goodness direct, that there should be a seal, of a similar import, in another?

But this is not all :—To infer, *from the unquestionableness of God's keeping covenant*, that circumcision could not have been a seal *on the part of God*, will render other instances of the divine condescension, towards his people, utterly unintelligible and useless :—Particularly, *his oath to Abraham*. The apostle says, “when God made promise to Abraham, “because he could swear by no greater, he swore “by himself.—Wherein God willing *more abundantly to show unto the heirs of promise the immutability of his counsel*, confirmed it by an oath. That by *two immutable things*, in which it was *impossible* for God “to lie,” believers might have “*a strong consolation.*” Heb. vi. 13, 17, 18. But before this oath was made, God had bound himself to Abraham by *most positive declarations* : And, as to God's keeping his promise, it did not admit of a question. Where, then, on the principle upon which it is urged that circumcision was not a seal *on the part of God*, was there any need of this oath? And, how could this, *more abundantly* show the immutability of God's counsel, and increase the believer's consolation?

But it is said “that the scriptures teach, with “great explicitness, that circumcision, as a *sign of the covenant*, was wholly on the part of man.” This, it is said, particularly appears from Gen. xvii. 9, 11. But this is not admitted : For, of circumcision, God says, ver. 10. “This is *my covenant*, which ye “shall keep *between me and you* ;” plainly intimating himself to be a party in the covenant, equally with Abraham. And as the covenant is mutual, there is, every way, as much reason to suppose, that the seal of it respected one party, as the other—that circumcision, which God styles his covenant, was a seal *on his part*, as *on Abraham's*. The construction, therefore, which makes it a seal only on the part of man, must be wholly arbitrary.

But more particular attention will be paid to the next passage of scripture, which is urged in support of an hypothesis, perhaps never before adopted. The passage is this, Rom. iv. 11. in which the apostle says, that Abraham "received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had yet being uncircumcised." It is said that the apostle here *evidently* considers circumcision, as a seal of the covenant, as having a *sole* respect to Abraham. A careful attention to the passage will, however, lead to a different conclusion. For,

1. The phrase, *the righteousness of faith*, as it is found in the new testament, is never made use of to describe, either the *character*, or the *duty*, of the subject of faith; but always, to express *the blessing*, *the privilege* to which believers are entitled. It means the same as *justifying righteousness*; or, *that righteousness, the benefits of which are apprehended by faith*. Accordingly we find that, by this same apostle, it is opposed *to the righteousness which is of the law*. Rom. x. 5—9. Galat. iii. 6. and Philip. iii. 9. Nor is there want of evidence, from the chapter, and even the verse in which the passage under consideration is contained, that this is the sense in which it is here used. The apostle says that Abraham "received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had yet being uncircumcised: That he might be the father of all them that believe, though they be not circumcised: *That righteousness might be imputed unto them also.*" The righteousness of faith, therefore, *is that righteousness, which is imputed to those who believe, or have faith*. Abraham received circumcision, a seal of this righteousness: His *faith* was imputed to him for righteousness. The *righteousness of faith*, therefore, Abraham neither had, nor possibly could have, authority to *seal* to himself. As God alone

could confer this righteousness, he alone had a right to seal the promise of it.

Besides ; it would have been impertinent to the apostle's argument, to speak, either of Abraham's covenant-engagements, or of a *seal* of such engagements. He is here treating on the subject of *justification*, and proving that *it is by faith*, and not by the works of the law. He brings the instance of Abraham in proof ; and shows that he was justified by faith : And, then says that he received circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of faith ; that is, of that righteousness which was imputed unto him, upon his *believing*. It would have been nothing to the purpose of the apostle's argument, to say that Abraham had, *himself*, set a seal, his own seal, either to the sincerity of his faith, or to his engagements to keep covenant with God. Supposing he did, yet what instruction would that have given, respecting the *scripture-doctrine of justification* ? How would this prove, either that *Abraham was justified* by faith, or that other ungodly men are to be justified, not by the works of the law, but by faith ? Therefore the apostle adds, "For the promise that he should be the heir of the world, was not to Abraham, or to his seed, through the law, but through the righteousness of faith." The righteousness, through which Abraham was to heir the world, was *that righteousness*, which was sealed, in circumcision. If God bestowed that righteousness, that is, the blessing of his being the heir of the world, by *promise*, and of *mere grace* ; the seal, which Abraham received, of this righteousness, must have been a seal *on God's part*, confirming, to Abraham, the promise.

2. If circumcision were not a seal, on the part of God, of his covenant of promise, the mode of expression, in the passage before us, will naturally lead us to view it, as Abraham's own seal *of the purity and sincerity of his faith*. *The righteousness of faith,*

if it do not denote a blessing and gift of God, must mean the uprightness, or sincerity of faith. But it is hard to be believed, that God ever called Abraham, or any other man, to be *such a voucher of his own righteousness*. When there were mutual engagements, between God and Abraham, it is, every way, reasonable to suppose, that the seal, which God appointed, respected as much *his own promise*, as that of Abraham. And, the observations, which have been now made, on the passage under consideration, it is apprehended, render it sufficiently clear, that circumcision was the seal of *God's promise* to Abraham, of the blessings of his gracious covenant. And whether the infant, to be circumcised, had any personal title to the blessings of the covenant, or not; the circumcision, of both Abraham and his seed, was *God's seal* of that covenant, in which he promised, to Abraham, to be a God to him, and to his seed after him, in their generations.

The commission, which Christ gave his apostles, to baptize, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, plainly supposes *baptism*, also, to be a seal *on the part of God*. The manner of expression implies, that this seal was to be administered by the immediate authority of the Head of the church: And that they who are authorised to baptize, in this venerable name, act by an authority delegated by Christ. The right to administer this seal, appears to be peculiar to the ambassadors of Christ: As the right of setting the king's seal, to any instrument, is peculiar to the king's minister. And if baptism be God's seal of that righteousness, which is apprehended by faith; the parent has no more right to use it merely as a seal of dedicating his children to God, than one, who has a commission, under the king's great seal, has, to make use of this same seal, as a mark of dedicating his son to the king's service.

With this idea, of the nature and use of divinely instituted seals, corresponds the representation, given by St. John, of sealing the servants of God. He tells us, Rev. vii. 2, 3. "And I saw another angel ascending from the east, having *the seal of the living God* : And he cried with a loud voice to the four angels, to whom it was given to hurt the earth and the sea, saying, hurt not the earth, neither the sea, nor the trees, till *we have sealed the servants of our God in their foreheads.*" This sealing is generally understood, by divines, and that with good reason, to be the christian baptism. And this seal was set on the servants of God, by an angel, perhaps the angel of the covenant, as a mark of distinction, that they might be exempted from those evils and judgments, which were denoted by the four winds blowing on the earth, the sea, and the trees ; and, not as a sign, or seal, that these servants of God had *dedicated themselves to him.*

In the same light is the subject represented by the prophet. He tells us, Ezek. ix. 4, 5. "And the Lord said unto him, (to an angel,) go through the midst of the city, through the midst of Jerusalem, and *set a mark* upon the foreheads of the men that sigh, and cry for all the abominations that be done in the midst thereof. And to the others he said in mine hearing, go ye after him through the city, and smite : Let not your eye spare, neither have ye pity."

Here the mark, it is manifest, was *God's mark of distinction, in their favor* : As God only had a right to exempt them from the destruction, which he was bringing upon others.

A few more remarks shall close our observations on the nature and import of *seals*, as they respect the present controversy.

It is said, in the "Inquiry" before us, p. 105,

“ *Seals* are not used, solely, to make over and confirm blessings ; but they are used, also, to indicate and mark property. The husbandman sets his seal, or mark, upon the horns of his oxen, and the hoofs of his horses ; not to confirm them as the property of another, but as a mark of their being his property. The merchant sets his seal on his goods, to denote that they belong to him. From this use of seals there appears a propriety in God’s directing *his seal* to be placed on the children of believers ; for they are God’s not merely by creation, but they are dedicated and consecrated to his service.”

On this passage we remark,

1. That the real import and significancy of *divinely instituted seals*, cannot be collected, in any measure, from the use which mankind make of seals, in the common transactions and business of life. Supposing *men* mark, or seal their property, not to make over and confirm it to others, it will, by no means, thence follow, that the seal of a gracious covenant instituted by the *Deity*, was not designed as a token, or mark, confirming the blessings of that covenant to him, on whom God directs the seal to be set. The nature and import of divinely instituted seals, are to be learnt altogether from the holy scriptures ; and, not at all, from the various uses, which men make of marks and seals.

2. What is here said teaches us to consider baptism, even the baptism of *infants*, as *God’s seal* placed on the subject. If God directs *his seal* to be set on the infant-seed of believers, in token of the property he has in them, both by creation, and the consecration their parents have made of them to his service ; it is manifest that infant-baptism is something more than merely a mark of parental dedication. That God should direct his seal to be set upon them, as a token of the property he has in them *by creation*, is

what no one will readily believe:—For he has no other property, on this account, in the children of believers, than he has in all other children. This reason for baptizing the children of believers, would be equally a reason for setting the *seal of God* on all other children; yea, and on every thing else.

The propriety of baptizing the children of believers, therefore, must arise from their being dedicated and consecrated to the service of God, by their parents. And God's seal, by which they are distinguished from all others, can be a seal, only of the *peculiar property*, which God has, in such children, by their being given up to him, in covenant, by believing parents. And if God distinguishes such children from all others, by directing the seal of his new covenant to be set upon them; it would be no more than natural and rational to suppose that, in mercy to parents, who sincerely give up their children to God, the mark of distinction set upon them, *is a mark of distinction in their favor*. The propriety of baptizing such children, the reader will observe, is urged, from the consideration of the *property*, which God has in them, by *creation*, and by their being *dedicated and consecrated to him, by believing parents*. The first of these, every one will see, can be no reason at all for baptizing infants. The propriety of setting God's seal upon the infant-seed of believers, must arise, therefore, wholly from the property, which God has, in them, on account of their being dedicated and consecrated to his service. If God, *for this reason*, direct his seal to be set on the children of believers, it must be because they are to be a *peculiar treasure* to him. We know of no other way than this, in which the Deity has any property in one thing, more than in another. But, *in this way*, God graciously condescends to represent himself as having peculiar and distinguishing property in his people. Thus he addressed the people of

Israel, after he had brought them out of Egypt, Exod. xix. 5, 6. "Now therefore, if ye will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people : for all the earth is mine. And ye shall be unto me, a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation." Such as are God's property in a peculiar manner, he considers as his jewels : And, of those who fear him, it is said, Malachi, iii. 17. "And they shall be mine, saith the Lord of hosts, in the day when I make up my jewels."

To such an idea as this, of the propriety of administering baptism to the infant-seed of believers, and placing God's seal upon them, no objection will be made. But every suggestion, that the Deity directs his seal to be set on children dedicated to him, for a reason in any measure similar to that, for which the husbandman sets his seal, or mark, upon the horns of his oxen, and the hoofs of his horses, must be without sufficient foundation.

Such arguments have now been produced in proof that circumcision was originally instituted as a seal, on the part of God, to his covenant of promise, as well as on the part of man, to his compliance with the proposals of this covenant, as, it is apprehended, must carry conviction to the candid mind. The holy scriptures, as well as the reason of the thing, clearly decide, that it was the seal of God. Nor is there the least evidence, either from the word of God, or from any other consideration, that circumcision was ordained, merely as a mark, or token, either of personal, or of parental engagements.

And, as baptism, as a seal of the covenant of grace, takes the place, under the present dispensation, of circumcision under the former ; the arguments, which prove circumcision to have been a seal on the part of God, it is presumed, will be admitted as proof, also, that the rite of baptism is of the same import. If cir-

cumcision were, heretofore, a seal, on the part of God, to his covenant of promise; the christian baptism is, now, to be considered in the same light.

The reader will readily discern, that an investigation of the true import of the *rite* of baptism, is of the utmost importance, in deciding justly upon the controversy before us. If it be indeed, as Mr. *Strong* insists, that the christian-baptism is a seal *only on the part of man*—if it be nothing more than a mark of personal, and parental engagements; the conclusion is obvious, that neither adult, nor infant-baptism, are any thing more than a mark of personal, and parental dedication. Only let proof be produced, that *this solely* is the true and proper import of the *rite* of baptism; there will be little room left, for any one to urge, that *infants* are to be baptized, because they are comprehended, with their believing parent, in God's gracious covenant of promise.

But, on the other hand, if baptism be a *seal of God, to his own covenant of promise*, it will be difficult for us to discover a reason, why the Deity should direct it to be set on any, who are not comprehended *in the promise*. To say the least, infant-baptism will appear to be something more, than merely a mark of parental dedication.

SECTION III.

In which it is inquired why the seal of God's covenant of promise is directed to be set on the infant-seed of believers.

THE observations, which were made in the preceding section, sufficiently evince that circumcision was instituted as a seal of God's gracious cov-

enant of promise—that it was a seal, *on the part of God*, confirming and securing the blessings of that covenant to him, who embraced it. The christian-baptism, we have sufficient reason to conclude, was instituted with the same design, and for the same purpose. Neither circumcision heretofore, nor baptism under the gospel-dispensation, were to be administered to any adults, excepting such as appeared to embrace the covenant. To these indiscriminately, circumcision heretofore was the same seal of the righteousness of faith, as it originally was to Abraham. And, to all, who now embrace God's new and gracious covenant, baptism is equally God's seal of the righteousness of their faith, and of their sure title to all the blessings of the covenant of grace. Therefore the apostle says, Gal. iii. 27, 29. “For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ, *have put on Christ*: And if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and *heirs according to the promise.*”

It is conceded, on each side of the present controversy, that, as the infant-seed of believers were to be circumcised, under the former dispensation; so, the infants of believers, under the present, are to be baptized. Whether infants were heretofore to be circumcised, and are now to be baptized, because they are comprehended in the covenant with their believing parents—whether they are to have the seal of God's covenant of promise set upon them, because they are included in the promise of that covenant; is a point, on the decision of which, the present controversy entirely depends.

It will readily be confessed, by all the candid and judicious, that the *import* of the seal of the covenant, as it respects infants, is to be discovered no where but in the holy scriptures. Nothing, in this case, is left to human conjecture. The scriptures, and they alone, are to decide why, the seal of God's gracious

covenant of promise, is to be set on the children of believing parents. Here, then, we observe,

1. There is, no where in the holy scriptures, the least intimation, that the *seal* of the covenant, when set on the infant-seed of believers, is not a distinguishing mark of the *subject's* being comprehended in the *promise* of the covenant, as really and truly as when set upon an adult. There is but one account given in the holy scriptures, of the import of the seal, as it relates to the covenant on the part of God. There is not the least intimation that the seal, as a seal of a covenant on the part of God, respects the believing *parent in one light*, and the child, who is given up to him in faith, *in another; infinitely different from it*. If, to the one, it is designed to be the seal of a promise, on the part of the Deity, that *the Lord will be his God*; but to the other, the seal of no promise of any good, or blessing whatever; it might rationally have been expected, that so material and essential a difference, with respect to the design and import of a seal, so important in the christian institution, would have been, in some way, noted and marked out to us, in the word of God. Instead of this, there is not the least hint given, in the word of God, that the rite is not designed to be the seal of a promise, that the Lord will be a God to the subject, in one case, as well as the other.

2. It appears, from the words of the covenant, which God entered into with Abraham, when circumcision was instituted, that the seal of the covenant was to be set on *the child*, as well as on the *parent*, *because both parent and child*, were included in the promise of the covenant. A little attention to *the words, the terms*, in which the covenant of promise is conceived, will be sufficient to evince this. God said, "I will establish my covenant between me and thee, and thy seed after thee, in their generations, for an everlasting covenant; to be a God unto thee,

“ and to thy seed after thee. . And I will give unto
 “ thee, and to thy seed after thee, the land wherein
 “ thou art a stranger, all the land of Canaan, for
 “ an everlasting possession ; *and I will be their God.*
 “ And God said unto Abraham, Thou shalt keep
 “ my covenant *therefore*, thou and thy seed after
 “ thee, in their generations. This is my covenant,
 “ which ye shall keep between me, and you, and
 “ thy seed after thee ; every man-child among you
 “ shall be circumcised.” Gen. xvii. 7—10. Here
 we have the original institution of circumcision ;
 which has already been proved to have been a seal,
 on the part of God, of his gracious covenant of
 promise. And, though Abraham understood, and
 that justly, that he was required to circumcise him-
 self, it is observable that the terms of the covenant
 are much more explicit, with respect to the circum-
 cision of the infant-seed. The seed to be circum-
 cised is the same as that, to which the land of Ca-
 naan was promised, for an everlasting possession : To
 this seed the Lord said he would be a God. To
 this promise was circumcision a seal, and *that* on the
 part of God. As a mark, or token, of this divine
 promise, it was that Abraham was required to cir-
 cumcise, both himself, and his seed. The promise
 of the covenant made no distinction between Abra-
 ham, and his seed : And, in regard of the seal of
 it, there was to be no distinction. The latter were
 to wear the seal, as well as the former ; being as
 truly comprehended in the covenant of promise.
 The promise was, *I will be a God to thee, and to thy
 seed* : The command was, *therefore*, every man-
 child among you shall be circumcised. The reason
 assigned for the circumcision of, both parent, and
 child, is the same : And this is, that the promise of
 that covenant, of which circumcision was the seal,
 included the child, with the parent. Because the
 Lord had promised to be a God to Abraham, and

to his seed, Abraham was required to circumcise, both himself, and his seed. There is not the least ground for limiting the *reason* here given, for circumcision, to the promise simply that the Lord would be a God *to the parent*. Such a limitation must be perfectly unfounded and arbitrary. The reason, which God himself gives, for setting the seal on, both Abraham, and his seed, is, that both were embraced by the covenant of promise.

As the covenant, which God established with Abraham, when circumcision was instituted, did not respect simply this father of the faithful ; but, was to extend to future generations, and be an everlasting covenant ; we can see the propriety, and importance of very explicit directions with respect to *the circumcision of the seed*. For, by this rite was God's covenant transmitted and renewed on his part, and received and recognised by the people of Israel, in every successive generation. In this way was the covenant to be transmitted, from one generation to another, that it might be a perpetual covenant with Abraham, and with his seed after him, in all future generations. By *this mark* were they separated and distinguished from all other people : And, by *this*, designated as the covenant-people of God, a holy nation. Therefore it is that we find the terms *circumcised* and *uncircumcised* used synonymously with *holy* and *unclean*. To the people of Israel God thus addresses himself, by the prophet, Isai. lii. 1. "Awake, awake, put on strength, O Zion, put on thy beautiful garments, O Jerusalem, the holy city : For henceforth there shall no more come into thee the *uncircumcised* and the *unclean*." God likewise directed his people, Levit. xix. 23, 24. "And when ye shall come into the land, and shall have planted all manner of trees for food ; then ye shall count the fruit thereof as *uncircum-*

“ *cised* : three years shall it be *uncircumcised* unto
 “ you : *it shall not be eaten of*. But in the fourth
 “ year all the fruit thereof shall be *holy* to praise
 “ the Lord.”

As it was strictly required that every man-child should be circumcised, God styles circumcision *his covenant in the flesh*. And as it was a seal, on the part of God, of his covenant of promise, *all*, both great and small, who were circumcised agreeably to divine institution, were considered as comprehended in this covenant. Therefore is it added, “ And
 “ the uncircumcised man-child, whose flesh of his
 “ foreskin is not circumcised, that soul shall be cut
 “ off from his people : he hath broken my covenant.”

It is not to be omitted, however, to notice that Mr. *Strong* supposes, that the excision, here spoken of, does not respect the child, but the parent, who neglects to circumcise his child. And, there is respectable authority, he tells us, to support such a version of the text, as shall determine the breach of covenant, here spoken of to respect the parent. He says, “ As God had been revealing the duty of *parents*, in their successive generations, to circumcise their children, as a token of *their* keeping covenant, it would be an extraordinary mode of
 “ arguing to infer from thence that, if the circumcision of a child should be neglected, the *child*
 “ would break covenant.” See II. Inquiry, p. 46, 47. This observation, the intelligent reader will observe, derives its plausibility of argument, from the assumption, that infant-circumcision was no more than a mark, or seal of parental engagements. If the *child were not comprehended* in the covenant of promise, on condition of the *parent's* fulfilling the duties required of him—if *provision were not made* in that covenant, which was to descend to future generations, and be everlasting, for the *child* to be joined

to the people of the Lord ; it will be difficult, it is true, to see how the *child* should be cut off from his people, and excluded from a covenant, in which he was never comprehended. But it ought to have been proved, that the circumcision of the child was nothing more than a token of the *parent's* keeping covenant, before it was from thence concluded, that this neglect of *parental* duty and faithfulness did not, necessarily, according to the constitution of the ancient church, leave the child out of the covenant, and separate it from the congregation of God's people.

As the covenant with Abraham, was with him and his seed after him ; and was formed to be transmitted, by certain parental duties, to each successive generation ; it is easy to see that the neglect of these duties, in the risen generation, would interrupt the succession, and leave the rising generation in the family of Abraham, as much out of covenant, as those of any other family. Accordingly, we find it said, that "*the uncircumcised man-child, whose flesh of his foreskin is not circumcised, that soul shall be cut off from his people.*" And whatever human authorities there may be for supposing the excision here mentioned to relate only to the *parent*, there is the authority of every rule of grammatical construction, for supposing that it certainly relates to the *uncircumcised man-child*. God had just been speaking of circumcision as *his covenant in the flesh* ; and then plainly teaches that the child, who is not circumcised, not having the covenant of God in his flesh, shall be cut off and separated from his people. The terms are explicit, that *the uncircumcised man-child shall be cut off from his people*. Nor is it at all strange, that God should let parents know, that the extension of the covenant and its blessings to their posterity, depended upon their faithful performance of the conditions required of them—that if they neglected the

duties required on their part, and did not circumcise their children, God would visit this iniquity upon their *offspring*, and cast *them* off from being his people.

And if it be, as it is thought has been already sufficiently proved, that circumcision was originally instituted as a seal, on the part of God, of his covenant of promise—if this covenant of promise comprehended both Abraham, and his seed—if the seal of it were to be set upon the child, as well as upon the parent, *because both were included in the promise of the covenant*—and, finally, if by this act of parental duty, together with others naturally connected with it, the covenant was transmitted to posterity, and each successive generation owned and acknowledged by God, as his covenant people: It will be manifest that, not only *an uncircumcised man-child*, but a whole generation, if uncircumcised, must, according to the tenor and conditions of the covenant, be cut off and separated from God, and cast out of covenant.

Before it can appear with any tolerable degree of evidence, that the excision spoken of, Gen. xvii. 14, respects only the parent, and not the uncircumcised man-child; it must be made evident that circumcision was not originally instituted as a seal *on the part of God*, of his covenant of promise—that the child was not included with the parent in this covenant of promise—and, that the reason, for which infant-circumcision was enjoined, on the awful penalty of being cut off from God's people, was not, that the covenant of promise comprehended the infant-*seed*.

It cannot be made evident that circumcision was not originally instituted as a seal on God's part, as truly as on man's, until sufficient proof be produced that the phrase, *the righteousness of faith*, as used in the holy scriptures, means only *the sincerity and purity of faith*. And, when *this* shall appear to be the sense of the phrase, it will remain to be shewn

that *some other righteousness*, besides *such a righteousness* of faith, is necessary to the justification of a believer : —which, it is apprehended cannot be easily done.

In order that it may appear, that the child was not included in that covenant of promise, of which circumcision was a seal, no arguments which have been produced respecting a spiritual seed ; nor, the fullest evidence that men must become holy and spiritual, before they can be possessed of any title to the promises of the covenant, will be of any avail. To take it for granted that the covenant does not include the natural seed, because none can be saved, but such as become *spiritual*, is an assumption of the very point in debate : The thing contended for, being that, on the faithful performance of parental duty, *this condition* is secured by the covenant, to be wrought in the *natural seed*. Over and above every argument of this kind, in support of the sentiment that the natural seed was not included in the promise of the covenant ; it must be made evident, either that the *natural seed*, was not the seed to which God promised to give the land of Canaan for a possession ; or, that he did not promise to be the God of those, to whom this good land was to be given. But the express words of the promise, after the Lord had said to Abraham that he would be a God to him, and to his seed after him, are, “ And “ I will give unto thee, and to thy seed after thee, “ the land in which thou art a stranger, all the land “ of Canaan, for an everlasting possession ; and I “ *will be their God.*” When these words can be so paraphrased and criticised, as to exclude the natural seed from the promise, both that the land of Canaan should be given them, and that the Lord would be their God ; it will, then, be admitted that the child was not included, with the parent, in that covenant of promise, of which circumcision was the seal.

In support of the opinion, that the excision threatened for the neglect of circumcising the child, re-

spected the parent only ; it must appear that the child's being included in the covenant of promise, was not a reason why it was required to be circumcised. But, from the previous observations, it is manifest that this cannot be made to appear. When God had made his promise to Abraham, that he would be a God to him, and to his seed after him—even that seed to which he would give the land of Canaan ; he immediately adds, “ Thou shalt keep “ my covenant *therefore* : ”—and this covenant was, that every man-child should be circumcised. The reason, which God himself here gives, for requiring the circumcision of the child, is, his gracious covenant of promise, that he would be a God, not only to the parent, but also to the child.

These things being considered, it must be clear, that the *uncircumcised man-child* was the object of the threatened excision. And it is hard to be seen how a child could be cut off, and separated from the people of God, and excluded from the covenant of promise on account of its being uncircumcised ; unless its circumcision, according to divine appointment, were a mark of its being included in that covenant of promise.

If the reason why pious and believing parents were, heretofore, to *circumcise* their infant-seed, was, that the promise, of which circumcision was a seal, was that the Lord would be a God *to the believer and his seed* : the reason why the infant-seed of believers, under the present dispensation, are to be baptized, is that they are comprehended in the promise of this same covenant, together with their believing parents. It will be necessary, therefore, that we proceed to enquire whether there be any sufficient authority to conclude that all the blessings, which were contained in that gracious covenant with Abraham, of which circumcision was a seal, are secured to Gentile believers, and belong to the christian church.

SECTION IV.

In which it is inquired whether the promise of that covenant, which God established with Abraham, that he would be a God to him, and to his seed after him belong to believers under the christian dispensation.

IT appears, from the holy scriptures, that God's promise to Abraham, of which circumcision was a seal, was not a peculiarity of the former dispensation; but, now exists in its full force, and belongs to all, under the gospel dispensation, who have the faith of Abraham. It would be natural to suppose, when that dispensation commenced, under which the church had ever been led to expect that divine spiritual influences would be more copious than they had been before; that the blessings of the Abrahamic covenant, instead of being diminished, would be enlarged. Accordingly,

1. It was promised to the church of God under the former dispensation, that she should be enlarged by accessions from the Gentile nations, and that the Gentiles should come to her light. As it was said to Christ, "It is a light thing that thou shouldest be
" my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob, and
" to restore the preserved of Israel: I will also give
" thee for a light to the Gentiles, that thou mayest
" be my salvation to the end of the earth:" So it was promised unto the church, under the former dispensation, that she should "break forth on the
" right hand and on the left; and that *her* seed
" should inherit the Gentiles, and make the desolate cities to be inhabited." See Isaiah xlix. 6, and liv. 3. Therefore it was said to the ancient church, "And the Gentiles shall come to thy light,
" and kings to the brightness of thy rising—Then
" thou shalt see and flow together, and thine heart

“ shall fear, and be enlarged, because the abundance of the sea shall be *converted unto thee*, and “ the forces of the Gentiles *shall come unto thee*.” Isaiah lx. 3, 5. These encouraging and comforting promises were addressed, it is to be observed, to the church, which was formed under the covenant established with Abraham, and which had its existence as a church by virtue of no other covenant. This is the church, which is comforted with assurances that she shall never be forsaken; but, on the other hand, shall be preserved and gloriously built up, and encreased and multiplied by large accessions from the Gentiles. The church built on the promise to Abraham, and formed under the covenant which was established with him, was never to come to an end, but was to exist forever. And, though many of the natural seed of Abraham were to be cut off for their unbelief, their place in this church was to be supplied from among the Gentiles. Tho’ the body of the Jewish nation were to be broken off, still this church was to survive every evil, and live forever.

As a further evidence that the promise, which the Lord made to Abraham, that he would be a God to him, and to his seed after him, belongs to believers under the gospel-dispensation, it is to be observed,

2. That the Gentile church is now grafted into the stock, the true olive-tree, from which the Jews were broken off for unbelief. The apostle says to the Gentile christians, “ And if some of the branches “ be broken off, and thou being a wild olive-tree, “ were grafted in amongst them, and with them “ partakest of the root and fatness of the olive-tree.” Rom. xi. 17. This passage plainly represents the christian church as being established upon the same foundation and principles, as those upon which the Jewish, had been formerly built. By the olive-tree,

we can understand no other than that covenant with Abraham, of which circumcision was the seal. By this covenant a foundation was laid for a church, in the family of Abraham. By this covenant only it is that a church of God now exists on earth. It was this covenant, which was transmitted by circumcision, from Abraham, to his posterity; and, by these means, a church preserved among the Jews, until they finally and utterly rejected it, and were cast off. The christian church partakes of the root and fatness of the olive-tree, which bore blessings to the ancient Jewish church, and upon which that church stood. The root and fatness of the tree were such, that they bore and produced blessings to the offspring, in consequence of the faith, the piety, and the duty of the parent.

As the covenant, which God established with Abraham when circumcision was instituted, is an everlasting covenant; and, is the only covenant in which a foundation is laid for a church of God to exist, from that time forward, to the end of the world:—And as, upon the Jews rejecting this covenant, the blessings of it are extended to believing Gentiles; and they are grafted in, where the Jews were broken off, and partake of the root and fatness of the tree, which bore the Jewish church: It must be manifest that the christian church shares in all the privileges and blessings, which were contained in the promises of this covenant, as established with Abraham, the father of the faithful. Abraham received circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of faith; that he *might be the father of all them that believe, though they be not circumcised*; that righteousness might be imputed unto them also: And *the father of circumcision* to them who are not of the circumcision only, but *also walk in the steps of that faith of our father Abraham, which he had being yet uncir-*

circumcised. Rom. iv. 11, 12. It appears evidently to be the gracious design of God, that all the blessings of his covenant with Abraham should be extended to believing Gentiles ; and, that they should share in every blessing and privilege of it, to as high a degree as they were enjoyed by the natural descendants from Abraham. God did not mean to distinguish the Jewish church, in point of privilege, above the Gentile : Nor did his covenant lay up more, or greater blessings, for believers among the natural seed of Abraham, than for those among the Gentiles, who become his seed by faith. It is in virtue of the same covenant, that the pious among the Jews were heretofore, and believers among the Gentiles are now, a church of the living God ; each having their place in that body, which is the fulness of Christ, and being an essential part of it.

And as it was one exceedingly valuable and important part of this covenant, as established with Abraham, that it provided blessings for the natural seed, on certain duties and conditions to be performed by the parent ; there can be no reason for supposing that the *christian church*, now existing under this same covenant, is cut off from this part of the privileges, which were heretofore annexed to it, and enjoyed by the Jewish church.

As it has been already proved, as is apprehended, that the promise to Abraham, of which circumcision was the seal, respected his natural seed ; and, that this seal was *therefore* to be set on the child ; it clearly follows, from the preceding observations, that this promise was never designed to be a peculiarity of the covenant *as established with Abraham* ; but, extends all the blessings and privileges contained in it, to Gentile believers.

Mr. Strong has largely considered the promises of that covenant, which was established with Abraham when circumcision was instituted. The whole of

the third section of his second inquiry, &c. is taken up, on this subject. He has labored to prove that a promise of continuing a church in the family of Abraham, was no *essential* part of the covenant of grace, which was established with him. Supposing this should be admitted, would it thence follow that, when the Lord promised to be a God to Abraham, and to his seed after him, that the *natural seed* was not intended? Because no promise was made to Abraham, which absolutely secured the existence of a church in his family, for any certain period, does it clearly follow that there was no promise to Abraham that, upon certain parental duties to be performed by him, the Lord would be a God to his child? Or, if the preservation of a church among Abraham's natural descendants, was no *essential* part of the covenant of grace, can it from thence be certainly inferred that the promise, *I will be a God to thee, and to thy seed after thee*, upon the conditions upon which it was made, was *typical* and but an *appendage* of that covenant?

There is sufficient evidence, from the general tenor of a variety of promises made to Abraham, that a true church should be preserved and perpetuated in his family. For this, *provision* was made in that gracious covenant of promise, of which circumcision was the seal. But this covenant simply, gave no further assurance that a church should be continued in the line of Abraham, than naturally arose from the promise, that the Lord would be a God to his seed, on condition of his faithful performance of parental duties.

Mr. Strong allows, p. 30. "That the covenant, which God established with Abraham, made *provision* for gracious qualifications to be transmitted from parent to child, so far as was necessary for the preservation of a church," &c. And, speaking of the transactions, between God and Abraham,

at the time when circumcision was instituted, he says p. 44. "Here, it is to be considered, God is introducing a new institution; and is teaching Abraham the peculiar design of it. In the first place, he informs Abraham, that it was not designed merely for him; but that it was also designed to extend to his seed, in their generations. That is, his *successors*, as they came upon the stage, must also conform to the same institution. Having enjoined it on Abraham and his seed, or successors, in their generations, to keep covenant, God proceeds to inform Abraham, what he and his seed, in their generations, must do *that* they may keep covenant." And this was, as he justly observes, the practice of circumcision agreeably to divine appointment.

On these concessions, it will be natural to remark,
 1. That the promise, made to Abraham, of which circumcision was the seal, implied that, upon his faithful performance of the duties required on his part, gracious qualifications, or converting grace, should be conferred on his child. If this were not the case, no *provision* was made for the preservation of a church in the family of Abraham. It is admitted that it was requisite to the support of a church, in the way in which God secured its support by promise to Abraham, that gracious qualifications should be *transmitted from parent to child*. But if gracious qualifications had not been transmitted, from Abraham, to his immediate offspring, the church, which existed in his family would have been extinct, even in the next generation.

2. It appears that God required the same thing, the same conditions and duties, of every successive parent, as he did of Abraham, in order to the preservation of a church and the transmission of gracious qualifications, from parent to child. God informed Abraham, that the promise *was not designed merely*

for him ; but that it was designed to extend to his seed, in their generations—that his successors, in their generations, must keep the same covenant, which was established with Abraham.

On this condition did the promise secure the preservation of a church, among Abraham's natural descendants, for future generations. And, on no other condition than this, did the promise of that covenant, of which circumcision was a seal, secure the future existence of a church.

3. It is, also, clearly admitted that the fulfilment of the promise, which was made to Abraham, that the Lord would be a God to him, and to his seed after him, in their generations, was not suspended upon the fidelity of Abraham simply ; but, that it depended as much upon the faithfulness of his successors, in keeping covenant, as it did on the faithfulness of Abraham. It will not be pretended that this gracious promise secured the existence of a church, by providing for the transmission of gracious qualifications, from parent to child, without the fidelity of each successive immediate parent. It being an absurdity to suppose that the church should be perpetuated, without the performance of that parental duty, in every successive generation, which the covenant of promise required. How this is consistent with the assertions, p. 22, 30, that “ the promise was made to Abraham, and was not transferred to any one after him ; and, that the simple condition of the promise was, Abraham's fidelity ;” is not, at present discerned.

4. If the promise in question related to the existence and perpetuation of the church of God ; and, for this end, contained provision for gracious qualifications to be transmitted, from parent to child, through each successive generation ; it is not easy to see in what respects it was a *typical* promise. We have no more reason to suppose that the *promise*, which provided for perpetuating a church, was typ-

ical; than, that the church itself, which was in this way perpetuated, was also typical. And, yet, it is manifest that the Jewish church, which was in this way formed, and preserved until that people utterly rejected the covenant, was no more a typical church, than that which was grafted on, where the Jews were broken off.

From these concessions and observations it must appear,

1. That the covenant with Abraham, of which circumcision was a seal, made provision for gracious qualifications to be transmitted, from parent to child, upon the faithful performance of certain parental duties; and, that it secured the transmission of such qualifications, in every instance, wherein these parental duties were faithfully performed, in every successive generation.

2. If the promise of this covenant were transmitted to the posterity of Abraham, through successive generations, on the same conditions upon which it was originally made to Abraham; it will clearly follow that all those, who are grafted into that olive-tree, which bore the Jewish church, and with them partake of its root and fatness, are equally entitled to the same gracious promise, as it respects their offspring, on a similar faithful performance of parental duty.

It appears, also from the New Testament, that the covenant of grace, under the gospel dispensation, comprehends believers and their seed, in the same manner as it did, heretofore, Abraham and his seed. There is the same provision, under the gospel dispensation, for gracious qualifications to be transmitted from believing parents to their children, as there was, when the Jewish church existed:—For the christian church is grafted on, where the Jewish was broken off. On this ground it was that our Saviour said, Luke, xviii. 16. “Suffer little chil-

"dren to come unto me, and forbid them not :
 " *For of such is the kingdom of God.*" It is said, in the verse immediately preceding, that they *brought infants* unto Christ, that he would touch them. The circumstances sufficiently show, not only that infants were brought to Christ for his blessing ; but that they, who brought them, were *believers*. No one, but a believer, would bring an infant to Christ, in hope of obtaining his blessing on it. No one, who thought Jesus to be an impostor, would ask a blessing from him. It may, therefore, justly be concluded, that the infants here spoken of, were brought to Christ by believers. The import of the Saviour's words, then, is, that children given up to him, by believers, agreeably to divine appointment, *are of that kingdom of God, which Jesus was then setting up in the world.* And, if the infant seed of believers, when consecrated to Christ agreeably to divine institution, are of his kingdom ; it must be that, upon such consecration, they are comprehended in that covenant, under which this church, or kingdom, is formed. Consequently, the covenant, by which believers are brought into the kingdom of Christ, comprehends them and their seed, in the same manner as the covenant with Abraham, heretofore, comprehended him and his seed.

On this ground it must be supposed to have been, that the apostle said, 1 Cor. vii. 14. that the children of believers are *holy* ; while those, of unbelievers, are *unclean*. It is not easy for us to apprehend in what respect the children of believers are holy, in distinction from the children of others, unless it be by some peculiar relation, which the covenant, into which their parents have entered, has to them. Nor would this be a sufficient reason for their being denominated *holy*, unless this holy covenant now comprehend believers and their seed, as it did under the former dispensation.

The supposition, that the children of believers are holy, only as all their other substance is, because *dedicated* to God, would render the apostle's argument, on this subject, unnecessary. For it appears, from the connexion in which the words stand, that a doubt had arisen, in the minds of some of the Corinthian christians, respecting the lawfulness of cohabiting with an unbelieving partner. From the argument, which the apostle makes use of, to remove this doubt, it appears that it arose from an anxiety for the offspring :—Otherwise, the observation, that the child is holy, even though but one of its parents be a believer, would not have been pertinent to a solution of it. To remove their scruples on this head, the apostle says, “for the unbelieving husband is sanctified *in* (it should have been rendered,) the wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified *in* the husband : Else were your children unclean ; but now are they holy.” From a strict rendering of the words, it evidently appears, that the holiness, or sanctification here spoken of, relates wholly to the *child*. And were this holiness nothing more than what arose merely from parental dedication, without the *child's* being any more comprehended in the promise of the holy covenant, than the children of *unbelievers* ; is it reasonable to suppose that a doubt would ever have arisen, in the mind of any sober christian, of the lawfulness of continuing to dwell with an unbeliever, to whom he, or she, had been previously united in marriage ?

It is easy to see that a believer might as honestly and cordially *dedicate his child* to God, as any other part of his substance : And *that* whether the unbelieving partner united in the dedication, or not. But when they reflected that the Jews, while owned as the only covenant-people of God, were ordered to *put away* the wives, which they had taken from

among the nations, who were uncircumcised ; and *this*, in obedience to the everlasting covenant, between God and them ; it might naturally be supposed that they would be solicitous to know, whether *the fruits, the consequences* of dedicating a child to God, would be the same, as if both the parents were believers. Nor could a believer entertain a doubt of its being a *duty* to dedicate all he had, to God, whether the partner were a believer, or not. To teach this duty, we can hardly suppose that a new revelation, from heaven, was necessary.

But if the covenant of grace were understood to be the same, under the gospel dispensation, as that, of which circumcision was heretofore the seal ; from the acquaintance they had with the former dispensation, a doubt might naturally be supposed to arise, whether the offspring were comprehended in the covenant now, as formerly, unless both the parents were believers. This was the doubt, which the apostle apparently addresses himself to remove : —As the ground of it is effectually removed, if the child of the believer be holy, even though the other parent be an unbeliever.

But if *dedication* be all the holiness, which is predicable of the child ; the assertion and reasoning of the apostle can be no more, than that, the believing party may, and does dedicate his child to God, even though the unbelieving do not.

There is reason, also, to suppose that Peter meant to hold up the same idea, of a connexion between the faith and piety of the parent, and the salvation of the child, which has been before urged ; and, to show that the blessings of the promise to Abraham, were extended, under the reign of Christ, to all believers, whether Jews or Gentiles. When they, who were pricked in the heart, on hearing the apostle's discourse on the day of Pentecost, inquir-

ed what they should do ; Peter answers, Acts, ii. 38, 39. " Repent and be baptized every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ, for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost. For the promise is to you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call." The same gracious promise, which God had heretofore made to Abraham, and his seed, still remained in full force, and was now extended, in all its grace and richness, to believers of other nations ; even to all, whom God by his grace should call, of whatever nation, and in every future period of time.

Sensible, however, that *the promise* here spoken of, is considered, by Mr. Strong, not as being the promise to Abraham, *I will be a God to thee, and to thy seed after thee*, but a promise by the prophet, Joel, ii. 28—31. It will be proper to pay more particular attention to it. And,

1. It is to be observed, that this prophecy of Joel evidently respects events, which were to take place, upon the coming of Christ, in the destruction of the Jewish nation and polity. The miracles, which were wrought on the day of Pentecost, were, in part, an accomplishment of this prediction. Therefore Peter says, " This is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel."

2. When they, who were pricked in their heart, inquired what they should do, Peter directed to that repentance and faith, which is the common and invariable condition of salvation, to sinners. And, in this, he follows the example of the prophet, who had said that, *whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved*. Joel had said, " And it shall come to pass in the last days, I will pour out my spirit upon all flesh ; and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy," &c. This prophecy, Peter says was fulfilled, in those miraculous events

which took place on the day of Pentecost. These were some of the *happy* fruits of the coming of Christ—the *favorable* events which were to follow. But, to impress the minds of his audience, whose attention was already much awaked, with a sense of the danger of rejecting that Jesus, who had been lately crucified; he proceeds, in his discourse, to the *evils*, which were predicted, by this same prophet, to follow upon the coming of Christ:—"The sun shall be darkened, and the moon shall be turned into blood," &c. Nevertheless all, who called on the name of the Lord, should be *saved*. The promise, by Joel, was not that all, who so call upon the name of the Lord, as to escape the evils, which are coming on the enemies of Christ, should be endowed with the *miraculous gifts of the spirit*; but, that they should be *saved*. Having spoken, to an awakened assembly, of the evils which were assuredly to be expected, in consequence of the coming of Christ, Peter improves the opportunity to set before them the evidence there was, that Jesus, whom they had crucified, was, in fact, the predicted Messiah. Being struck with the evidence, which the apostle exhibited, of the Messiahship of Jesus, their enquiry was, not like that of Simon Magus, how they might obtain the power of *miraculous gifts*, but how they might escape those awful evils, which were denoted by the *sun's being turned into darkness, and the moon into blood*.

3. Peter directed these inquirers to that, which would avail, not only to *their* salvation, but to the salvation of *all*, in every age and nation. Miraculous gifts were bestowed upon but few—not on all believers: And they were to be continued, and be of use, only for a short time. Nor was there any promise that these gifts should be conferred upon every believer, even in the apostolic age:—Much less upon every believer in all future ages. And if

there were no such promise existing, we may safely conclude that the apostle, when urging the common duty of repentance, and of being baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, would not enforce his exhortation by a promise of their being endowed with miraculous gifts. Therefore,

4. As there was no such promise, in fact, ever made to believers universally, either by the prophet Joel, or any other of the prophets; it cannot reasonably be supposed that the apostle, in the passage under consideration, had any reference to that promise, which the multitude then present beheld, with astonishment, so remarkably fulfilled in the wonders, which were then taking place before their eyes. To suppose that the apostle urged upon the Jews the duties of repentance and faith, by the consideration that the promise of miraculous gifts was to them and their children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord should call; would imply, not only that every believer then, but in all future ages, should be himself endowed with miraculous gifts, and see his sons and his daughters prophesying. But as no such promise was ever, either made or fulfilled, we have sufficient authority to conclude, that this was not the promise to which the apostle alluded.

From these considerations it may reasonably be concluded, that the *promise* here mentioned is that ever memorable one, which God made to Abraham, when he instituted the seal of circumcision. This promise is frequently and abundantly alluded to, in the New Testament, and emphatically stiled *the promise*. This is represented as *the covenant of grace*, in distinction from *that of works*. The gracious covenant, which God established with Abraham, and sealed with circumcision, is not less frequently designated by the phrase *the promise*, than by any other

whatever.† This use and application of the phrase *the promise*, cannot have escaped the observation of the careful intelligent reader of the apostolic writings.

From the preceding observations, there is sufficient evidence, it is apprehended, that the promise to Abraham, *that the Lord would be a God to him, and to his seed after him*, was neither limited to him simply, nor was any peculiarity of the former dispensation; but, is one of the rich and precious promises of that *new and gracious covenant*, into which *all believers*, whether Jews or Gentiles, are now received :—And, to the blessings and privileges of which, *all such* are entitled, to as large an extent as believers were, under the former dispensation. There is no intimation given, in any part of the New Testament, that any of the real privileges and blessings of that gracious covenant, which God established with the father of the faithful, are to be less amply enjoyed by believers, than they were under the former dispensation.

SECTION V.

Containing Inferences from the preceding observations.

IT has been attempted, in the preceding sections, to prove—That circumcision, under the former dispensation, was *God's own seal of his covenant of promise*, even that promise, which gives security of everlasting blessings to believers; and, not merely a seal, either of personal, or of parental dedication: That the reason which God gave for requiring *this seal* to be set on the infant-seed of believers, was, that this covenant of promise comprehended the seed, with the believ-

† As, Rom. iv. 13, 14, 16. Gal. iii. 17, 18. Eph. ii. 12. Heb. vi. 17, and x. 36, &c.

ing parent ; the words of the promise being, *I will be a God to thee, and to thy seed after thee.*—That the covenant, being formed to be everlasting, between God and Abraham, and his seed after him, in their generations, contained the same gracious promise to successive believers, respecting their seed, as it did to Abraham, respecting his ; and this, on the same conditions, on which it had been made to Abraham—And, finally that, as the same covenant, which God established with Abraham, when circumcision was instituted, now exists in full force between God and believers, under the christian dispensation ; all its promises and real blessings, not excepting those which respect their offspring, belong as much to christians, at the present day, as they did to Abraham at the time when God instituted circumcision as a seal of them.

If the arguments, which have been urged on these several subjects, are just, the following consequences are clearly deducible, viz.

I. That, as infant-circumcision was not heretofore, so neither is infant-baptism now, merely a mark of parental dedication. Seeing circumcision was originally instituted as God's seal of his promise of everlasting good to the subject, its greatest importance lies in this significancy and import of it. The seal is of far greater importance as a witness of God's gracious promise, than of any mere human engagements whatever. And, if this be the light in which the holy Scriptures teach us to view the seal, no man can have any right to appropriate it to his own use. It must be, at least presumptuous, in any man, to take God's seal—a seal of promises and blessings, which no one has a right to make, or power to confer, but God himself, and use it as a mark simply of his own personal engagements. The obligation, which men are under, to dedicate, both themselves and their offspring, to God, is obvious ;

and would have been indispensable, whether either circumcision, or baptism, had ever been instituted, or not. But, that men should have a right to take that seal, which God has appointed as a visible and standing mark and witness of his own eternal favor, and, make use of it as a sign, simply of certain personal purposes of their own, is what can by no means be admitted.

These observations will give us to understand how essential it is to the scheme of infant-baptism, which has been adopted and urged by Mr. *Strong*, that this seal be considered as the parent's only, and not God's. To this scheme, the sentiment of its being the parent's only, appears to be fundamental. For if it be the seal of a divine promise respecting the seed, there can be no authority for setting it on the *child*, unless *that* also be comprehended in the promise. And if the covenant of promise, of which baptism, as well infant, as adult, is the seal, comprehend both the believer and his seed, as it formerly did Abraham, and his seed; it will be clear, that infant-baptism is a rite of far greater import than that of merely parental dedication.

Nor will it be of any avail to urge, contrary to the sentiments of Mr. *Strong*, that, as the dedication of *infants* is an essential branch of parental duty, *their* baptism is a seal of God's promise of eternal favor to *the parent*: For this would imply that the promise itself was merely personal, having no reference to *any seed whatever*, either natural, or spiritual. And, therefore, it would imply that circumcision was the seal of no covenant, which was to be *everlasting*, between God and Abraham, and *his seed*:—A sentiment directly contrary to the express words of that covenant of promise, of which circumcision was the seal.

To say that circumcision was the seal of a divine promise, that the Lord would be a God to Abraham,

and to all who should be his spiritual seed, evidently gives up the idea of its having been a mark, either merely of personal, or of parental dedication ; and plainly admits the seal to witness a divine promise, respecting future generations. And, such a promise as this, every one will see, no man has a right, either to make, or to seal. To say, still further, that the covenant respected only a spiritual seed, without making any provision for the natural seed to become such, on any duty or condition whatever to be performed by the parent ; will imply that it gave no security to Abraham, that his natural seed should ever inherit, even the land of Canaan : Because *that seed* to which the Lord promised to be a God, sealing his promise with circumcision, was the *same seed*, to which he promised Abraham, that he would give this good land. Not only so, but if the only thing, which was both promised and sealed to Abraham, were, that the Lord would be a God to all, who should hereafter become believers ; there were no conditions whatever, on Abraham's part, upon which the fulfilment of this promise depended : As, it would be absurd to suppose, that the condition upon which God would be gracious, in future ages, to those, who should become his children by faith, was *the fidelity of Abraham*. And if there were no duty to be performed, by Abraham, to his posterity, upon which the bestowment of blessings on the seed mentioned in the covenant was suspended ; it is manifest that the practice of infant-circumcision was no branch of duty, which was required *by the covenant* as it respected the seed. However ineumbent it might have been, upon Abraham, to circumcise his male-children ; yet the obligation could not arise from a covenant, the promise of which was suspended on no parental duty whatever.

To say that infant-circumcision was only a seal of the promise to the *parent*, that the Lord would be

a God to *him*, would imply that the covenant imported nothing further, than that the Lord would be a God to the parent *on condition of his dedicating his child to him*.

To suppose that circumcision was the seal of a divine promise, that the Lord would be a God to Abraham, and to all, who should be his spiritual seed; clearly gives up the idea of its being merely a mark, either of personal, or of parental dedication.

To urge that the covenant respected a spiritual seed only, without containing provision for the natural seed to become a spiritual, on some duty or condition to be performed by the parent; will imply that the covenant of promise, with Abraham, had no respect whatever to his natural seed. To suppose that the covenant, of which circumcision was the seal, contained nothing more, in its promise, than that the Lord would be a God to all *believers*; implies that this promise was not suspended on the practice of *any parental duty* whatever: And, therefore, that the obligation to practice infant-circumcision did not arise from this covenant, but from foreign considerations.

There appears, therefore, an inconsistency in urging that the promise of that covenant, of which circumcision was the seal, either had respect to a *spiritual seed* in a general sense, or that it secured to Abraham the *existence* of such a seed; and, yet, considering this seal as nothing more than a mark, either of personal, or parental dedication.

II. If the seal of circumcision were, heretofore, to be set on the children of believers, *because* the covenant of promise comprehended, both the believer, and his child; it will appear, that the reason is now the same, why baptism should be administered to the children of christian parents. Sufficient evidence, it is thought, has already been given, that

this was the reason, which God himself assigned, for requiring so particularly and peremptorily, the practice of infant-circumcision. And if this were the reason, why believing parents were required, under the former dispensation, to circumcise the infant-*seed*; it will follow, that it must be on the same ground, if any, that believers are required, under the christian dispensation, to baptize their children.

If the practice of infant-circumcision were a condition of that covenant, in which the Lord promised to be a God to Abraham, and to his *seed*; it must, of course, have been, that it was the *natural seed*, which was respected in the promise: Because the practice of this rite, could not have been the condition, upon which the Lord secured his favor, by promise, to all in future generations, who should become believers. Mr. *Strong* seems to suppose, p. 9, 10, that the security of a succession of believers, depended, not on God's covenant-transactions with Abraham, but on the covenant of redemption. Consequently, the security that the Lord would be a God to believers, did not depend on *any parental duty* to be performed by Abraham. *That promise* of the covenant, therefore, which was suspended on the practice of parental duty, if it had regard to any seed whatever, must have respected the *natural seed*. It clearly follows, then, that the promise to Abraham, which was suspended upon the practice of infant-circumcision, and of other parental duties which were connected with it, was a promise which had a particular regard to the natural posterity.

And, if infant-circumcision were the condition of a covenant, with Abraham, respecting his natural seed; infant-baptism must, of course, be the condition of a covenant, with christian parents, respecting their natural seed:—Otherwise, it will appear, either that christians are not now within that same covenant of promise, of which infant-circumcision

was a seal; or, that this covenant, under the present dispensation, does not require infant-baptism.

III. If the promise of that covenant, of which circumcision was a seal, were typical, and a peculiarity of the former dispensation, *as far as it regarded the natural seed of Abraham*; it will be evident, that no authority can be derived, for the practice of infant-baptism, from the ancient use of infant-circumcision. It is a point, abundantly labored by Mr. *Strong*, that the promise of that covenant, of which circumcision was the seal, as far as it regarded the natural seed of Abraham, was but *a typical promise*—that it was *temporary, and limited to the former dispensation*. See, particularly, p. 37, 38, 39.

It has been already shown that the promise, of the covenant, which God made with Abraham, as far as it respected the natural seed, was suspended upon the practice of infant-circumcision:—The obligation to circumcise the infant-offspring, arose from the relation, which the covenant of promise had to the natural seed. If, therefore, this promise, in the relation it had to the natural posterity of Abraham, were *typical, temporary, and limited to the former dispensation*; it is manifest, that no authority can be derived from it, or from the ancient practice of infant-circumcision, for the present practice of infant-baptism. Under the fuller light of the gospel, and in the more mature state of the church, no argument in favor of infant-baptism can be derived, either from any *promise*, under the old dispensation, as far as it is to be viewed as merely typical and temporary, or from any *practice*, which had its origin in such a promise.

It is a sentiment, which Mr. *Strong* takes great pains to vindicate, that, under the christian dispensation, there is no promise, to believing parents, of any blessings for their natural seed, on any condition whatever to be performed by the parents; not

even so far as the promise, to Abraham heretofore, contained blessings for *his* natural seed.

If, then, the promise to Abraham, *as it regarded the natural seed*, gave rise, both to the duty, and the practice of infant-circumcision; it is abundantly clear, that, neither this covenant of promise, nor the practice of the ancient church upon it, furnish any authority for the practice of infant-baptism, under the gospel-dispensation.

Until, therefore, it be fairly and clearly proved, that the duty of circumcising infants did not result from the relation, which the covenant of promise, as established with Abraham, had to his natural posterity; every argument, which represents this promise as typical, and a peculiarity of the former dispensation, so far removes the principal pillar upon which the doctrine of infant-baptism rests. Again,

IV. If the promise, of which infant-circumcision was the seal, *were made to Abraham only*; and, do not belong to the covenant of grace, as existing between God and believers, under the christian dispensation; it will further appear that there is no just and sufficient authority for the practice of infant-baptism.

In treating of the promises, which were made to Abraham, when God entered into covenant with him, and instituted the seal of circumcision, great pains are taken, in the "Inquiry" before us, to prove that these promises, as far as they respected the natural seed, were made to Abraham only, and were never transferred to any one after him; and, particularly, that they do not belong to the covenant of grace, under the christian dispensation. See, p. 20, 22, 26, 40.

If, then, it be true, that Abraham was required to set God's seal of the covenant, upon his seed, because the promise comprehended the child, with the parent; it will be obvious that, where no covenant

exists between God and believers, which contains promises of blessings to believers and their seed, there can be no authority for setting the seal of this covenant upon the infant-offspring. If circumcision were God's seal of his promise to Abraham, that he would be a God to him, and to his seed; it is clear that, where no such covenant of promise exists between God and believers, no authority whatever can be derived from the ancient institution of infant-circumcision, for the practice of infant-baptism. To deny that the covenant of grace, which is established with believers, now respects them and their seed, as it formerly respected Abraham and his seed; as effectually removes the ground of infant-baptism, as a denial that the covenant, which was originally sealed with circumcision, was, in reality, the covenant of grace.

If the covenant, which God made with Abraham, and sealed with circumcision, were another, and a different covenant from that, which now subsists between God and believers; it will be evident that no authority, for the practice of infant-baptism, can be derived from the ancient institution of infant-circumcision. The same consequence will flow, with equal clearness, from limiting the promise of the covenant, as it respected the seed, to Abraham alone, with whom the covenant, with a seal, was originally established.

Thus manifest is it, if the observations, which have been previously made respecting the nature and import of circumcision, and the ground upon which it was required, by covenant, to be practised on infants are just; that the scheme of baptism in the "Inquiry" before us, is, in various ways, utterly subversive of the doctrine of infant-baptism.

V. If circumcision were God's seal of his covenant of promise, and were to be set on the infant-seed of Abraham, because the promise was to him and his

seed; there is full and sufficient authority for the practice of infant-baptism, under the present dispensation.

It is exceedingly obvious, that baptism is as really, and in the same sense, a seal of God's gracious covenant of promise with believers, under the gospel dispensation, as circumcision was, of this same gracious covenant with Abraham, the father of the faithful. The covenant, which now subsists between God and believers, is the same as that, which God graciously entered into with Abraham, and sealed with circumcision. This covenant, when originally established with a seal, comprehended believers and their seed. For this reason was its seal to be set on the infant-seed of believers, by the successors of Abraham, in every age of the Jewish church. The Jewish church was a true and real church of God; and the only visible church, which God had on earth. The conditions of the covenant, which was sealed with circumcision, were the same to the successors of Abraham, as to Abraham himself: And, their observance and performance were equally necessary to their keeping covenant, and retaining a standing in the visible church. When this covenant, in the true spirit and import of it, ceased to be observed, the Jews, as a people, were rejected, and believing Gentiles received into it. Where the Jews were broken off, Gentile christians were grafted on. But, as *all the natural branches* were not broken off, believing Gentiles were grafted in *among them which remained*, and with them partake of the root and fatness of the olive-tree, from which the unbelieving Jews had been broken off. The *christian church*, at first, for a time, consisted only of Jews: And *this* was the same church, which was originally set up in the family of Abraham. It was formed under that same covenant of promise, which was originally sealed with circumcision. This cov-

enant of promise was the true, evangelical covenant ; and, of this evangelical covenant, the circumcision, both of parent, and of child, was the seal. This covenant never has been, and never will be done away. Under this covenant was the christian church originally formed ; and under this, it still exists, and will exist to the end of time. This is the covenant, which is now sealed with the christian baptism.

And if the covenant, under which the christian church was originally formed, be the same as that under which a church was formed in the family of Abraham :—If the christian church, consisting originally only of Jews, be the Abrahamic church continued : What reason can there be for supposing, that these *believing Jews* lost their title to any of the *promises* of this covenant, by embracing it in its true spirit and import, and becoming christians ? Did Jewish believers, on embracing this covenant, under the christian dispensation, expose themselves to be deprived of some of the blessings it promised ? As little reason have we to suppose that they were liberated from any of its duties.

Had not the covenant, under the christian dispensation of it, comprehended both believers and their seed, as it formerly did : Or, had it cut off the parent from the privilege of setting the seal, of so gracious a covenant, on the offspring ; what a mighty bar would this have been, to the Jews, in the way of their embracing christianity ? On the contrary, we find, that Jewish christians enjoyed the privilege, both of the promise, and of the seal, of the covenant made with Abraham, to the full extent in which they were enjoyed, by pious people, under the former dispensation. The Jews, on becoming christians, were deprived of no one promise, or privilege, of the covenant, as established with Abraham. Accordingly, they administered the seal, of this covenant

of promise, to their infant-offspring, just as had been practised in all former ages of the Jewish church. See, Acts xxi. 20—24.

And if the christian church, while consisting only of *Jews*, enjoyed *the same*, and *all* the privileges of the covenant of promise with Abraham, which had been indulged to pious Jews before; and were to use and apply the seal of this covenant, both to themselves, and to their infant-seed, just as it had been used and applied under the former dispensation; it was, indubitably, both the duty, and one of the privileges, of the first *christian* church, to set the seal of the covenant, which this church was now under, and which this same church of God had been under from the days of Abraham, upon the infant-offspring.

And, if the first Jewish converts to christianity, enjoyed all the privileges of God's gracious covenant of promise with Abraham; and still used, and applied the seals of it to their infant-offspring, just as they had done before the christian dispensation was introduced; it may safely be concluded that *Jewish christians* will continue to enjoy these privileges, and apply these seals, in the same manner as they had done under the former dispensation, as long as the christian dispensation shall continue on earth. If those Jews, *who were not broken off from the good olive-tree*, enjoyed the privilege of setting the seal of God's gracious covenant upon their infant-seed; the whole body of the Jewish nation will enjoy the same privilege, when they shall be converted to christianity, and be grafted into *their own olive-tree*. For the apostle, in his reasonings, Rom. chap. xi. assures us that the time will come, when those natural branches which were broken off for their unbelief, shall again be collected, and grafted into their own olive-tree.

And if this were the duty, and the privilege, of the christian church, while consisting only of Jews;

both its duty, and its privilege, continued to be the same, upon the door of it being opened to receive Gentile believers. Had it been otherwise, there must of necessity have been a division between the Jewish, and the Gentile church : And they could not have united in one body. If *Jews*, who embraced the covenant, under the christian dispensation of it, still enjoyed the right of setting its seal on their infant-offspring ; Gentiles, who embraced this same covenant, were received into this same church and family, and incorporated into the same body with Jewish christians ; must, also have enjoyed the same right to its seal, both for themselves, and their offspring.

And if the whole Jewish nation, when united in the same christian church with the Gentiles, will enjoy the privilege, and practise the duty of setting the seal of God's gracious covenant of promise upon their infant offspring ; it may safely be concluded that the whole christian church, on earth, will do the same.

Further ; it was as much the *duty* of those Jews, who embraced the covenant, which was established with Abraham, under the christian dispensation, to set its seal on their infant-seed ; as it was the duty of those, who embraced it under the former dispensation, then to set its seal on the offspring. The original duty and obligation remained the same, in this respect, as it ever had been : Nor could the command be repealed by any other authority than that, by which it was originally given. And, if the command, to set the seal of the covenant upon the offspring, still remained in force, and were binding on *Jews*, who were of the christian church ; it was equally binding, and still remains to be so, on Gentile members of *this same church*, embracing the same covenant of promise.

Thus clearly may we infer, from preceding observations, both the duty, and the right, of administering *baptism*, the seal of God's gracious covenant of promise with Abraham *under the present dispensation*, to the infant-seed of believers.

There appears no way to avoid this consequence, unless it be, either to deny that the covenant with Abraham, of which circumcision was the seal, was the same covenant of grace, under which believers now are, or, that the promise of it, as it respected the natural seed, is continued, and still extended to believers, under the christian dispensation.

If it be true, that God's covenant with Abraham, which was sealed with circumcision, was not, in the strict sense, the covenant of grace :—If it were not in reality that same covenant, under which the *christian* church was originally formed, and now exists ; it will be acknowledged that little, or no evidence can be derived, from the ancient practice of infant-circumcision, in favor of infant-baptism. But if the covenant, under which the christian church exists, and by which its several members are united, be the same as that, which heretofore required its seal to be set on the infant-seed of believers ; it will obviously be the duty, and an indispensable part of the duty of believers, at the present day, to administer the seal of this covenant to their infant-offspring.

So, also, if the promise of the covenant, which God established with Abraham, when circumcision was instituted, do not respect and comprehend the natural seed of believers, as it originally did the offspring of Abraham ; the injunction upon that father of the faithful to circumcise his children, will afford a very slender authority for the practice of infant-baptism.

If the covenant, of promise which was heretofore sealed with circumcision, *as it respected the in-*

sant-feed were only typical, it will be difficult to infer, either the right, or the duty of infant-baptism, from the ancient practice of infant-circumcision. There is the same reason to suppose that the *seal* of the promise, as it respected the natural seed, was typical, as that the *promise itself* was so. As far as the *promise* was typical, it would be natural to suppose that its *seal*, also, was typical :—Seeing it would be unreasonable to suppose, that the seal of the *real* blessings contained in the promise, should be required to be set on such, as are no more than *faint imi- ges* of those, for whom the blessings are intended.

It is not forgotten that it is said, in the “Inquiry” before us, p. 40. that “circumcision had but a *circumstantial* respect to the *promise*, which God “made to Abraham—that the promise itself was “but a circumstantial promise.” This promise indeed, is here spoken of as God’s promise of *maintaining a church in the family of Abraham*. But *this*, however is not pretended, by the author, to be any other, than the promise, of which circumcision was the seal : As it is on that covenant of promise, spoken of, Gen. xvii. 7, 8, that he is professedly treating. But the assertion, that the *seal* had but a circumstantial respect to the *promise*, of which it was a seal, must certainly be without sufficient foundation. The promise was, “I will be a God to thee, “and to thy seed after thee.” The command was, “Thou shalt *therefore* circumcise thyself, and thy “seed ;” or, which is the same, “*Every man-child shall be circumcised.*” There is as much reason to believe that the seal had but a circumstantial respect to the promise, in regard of the parent, as of the child. The child was as explicitly comprehended in the promise, as the parent : And *for this reason* the seal of it was to be set on the child, as well as on the parent.

Hence it appears, there is every reason to suppose,

that the *seal* of the promise, as it respected the child, was merely figurative and typical, which there is to suppose that the *promise sealed* was such. The *seal* could secure nothing more than the *promise*; nor have any other respect to the infant, than was had to it in the promise.

If, then, the promise, as far as the infant-*seed* was regarded in it, were only figurative and typical; it will follow, from the observations and reasonings in the "Inquiry" before us, that no authority can be derived from the practice of infant-circumcision, under the former dispensation of the covenant of grace, for the practice of infant-baptism, under the christian dispensation.

If these are the natural consequences of the sentiments and reasonings of Mr. Strong on the subject of infant-baptism, it will clearly show that they are not supported by the word of God. The holy scriptures, as it is apprehended, must, in many instances, be perverted from their natural and obvious meaning, in order to evade objections, which naturally offer themselves, against the opinion, that the baptism of infants was never designed to be any thing more than a *mark of parental dedication*. Thus circumcision, which the apostle tells us, Abraham received as *a seal of the righteousness of his faith*, is represented, in the "Inquiry" before us, as nothing more than a *token on Abraham's part, of his compliance with the covenant, which God had proposed to him*; and, consequently, not a mark, or seal of God's imputing righteousness to him upon his believing—contrary to the plain import of the apostle's argument on the subject of *justification by faith*.

So, also, the covenant, which God established with Abraham, when circumcision was instituted, and the promise of it, as far as it respected his natural seed, is represented as nothing more than a typical transaction. This promise, it is said, was itself

but a *circumstantial* promise ; and, that *circumcision* had but a *circumstantial* respect to it. See p. 37, 38, 40. This promise, it is nevertheless acknowledged, p. 39, secured the maintainance of a church among the natural posterity of Abraham.

Yet the words of the promise to Abraham are, “ I will establish my covenant between me and thee, “ and thy seed after thee—for an everlasting covenant ;—And I will give unto thee, and to thy seed “ after thee, the land of Canaan, for an everlasting “ possession.” If this promise were *typical*, as it respected Abraham’s seed, why was it not so, as it respected Abraham himself ? If it were *circumstantial* as it respected the offspring, why not equally so, as it respected the parent ? The promise is the same, as it respected both the one, and the other ; and, conceived and expressed in the same terms. All the blessings, all the good which it contains for one, it contains also for the other. The words of the promise, neither make, nor admit a distinction.

But if this covenant of promise, as it respected Abraham, were no more than circumstantial and typical, where shall we find a promise, which secured to him the substantial, essential blessings of the covenant of grace ? To say that the promise was the covenant of grace *as it related to Abraham*, but was only typical *as it related to his posterity*, is saying that for which the words and terms of the promise, and the manner in which they are connected, give not the least colour of authority. To say that the seed mentioned in the promise, was a spiritual seed, and therefore it contained properly the covenant of grace, is giving up the idea that the promise secured the maintainance of a church among the natural posterity of Abraham. For if the seed, to whom the Lord said he would be a God, were only a spiritual seed, and no provision were made for the natural seed to become a spiritual, on any condition to

be performed by the parent ; it is manifest that it contained no security that a church should be preserved, in the family of Abraham, for any future period whatever.

And if circumcision had but a circumstantial respect to the promise, which God made to Abraham, that he would be a God to *his seed*, it must, of course, have had but a circumstantial respect to the promise, that the Lord would be *his* God. And, if it had but a circumstantial respect to *this great and ever memorable promise*, it will be difficult to prove that it was, originally, a seal of the covenant of grace.

Thus do the reasonings, in the “ Inquiry ” before us, and the construction which is put on a divine institution, and on a variety of passages of scripture, it is apprehended, greatly tend to weaken the evidence of the doctrine of infant-baptism, to confirm the opposers of it in their opposition to it, and to justify such a construction of the transactions with Abraham, and the design of circumcision, as will take away the ground of this important doctrine.

SECTION VI.

Containing miscellaneous observations and remarks on Mr. Strong's second Inquiry, &c.

BY what has been already observed, in the preceding sections, it will readily be seen, that the decision of the present controversy depends, in a great measure, on just apprehensions of the real design and import of the rite of circumcision. If, in its original design, it were only *man's seal*—a seal *only of personal, or of parental engagements* ; it will no longer be contended, that infant-baptism is any thing

more than a mark of parental dedication. *This hypothesis being admitted*, several of the objections, which have been raised against the scheme advocated by Mr. Strong, will naturally fall; and the answers, which he has given them, will be acknowledged to be sufficient. But if it appear, on the other hand, that circumcision was originally *God's seal to his own gracious covenant of promise*; the pertinency of several answers to objections, will not be so obvious.

Thus as to the objection, that, on supposition infant-baptism be no more than a mark of parental dedication, we see no way in which it ever becomes God's seal of his promise to bestow, on the subject, the blessings of the covenant of grace. To this it is replied, p. 102. "The child's being brought to
" the exercise of faith, and a personal compliance
" with the covenant, and to engage obedience to its
" requirements, it may, with propriety, give a personal signification to his baptism in infancy." But this personal signification, the reader will observe, is nothing more, than of *personal engagements*. But if baptism be God's seal of the righteousness of faith, and of his promise to bestow the benefits of righteousness on the subject, to whom the ordinance is properly administered; it yet remains to be shown, how a mere mark of parental engagements can ever obtain a significance of so high an import.

Again, it was objected, that, if infant-circumcision were no more than a mark of parental dedication, it would not be easy to discover, how the future disobedience of the child, should ever occasion his circumcision to become uncircumcision. It is here to be observed, that the circumcision, which the apostle speaks of as becoming uncircumcision, was that which was administered in infancy:—For, the apostle's address is, here, to Jews, who were circumcised while they were yet infants. It is replied, p. 100, that "The child's being a breaker

“ of the law, never was supposed, on any scheme, “ to invalidate a parent’s covenant-claims.” But if Abraham’s circumcision were God’s seal of his promise, to him, of eternal life; and Isaac’s, no more than a seal of promises on Abraham’s part; there were no *covenant-claims*, or rights whatever, which could be invalidated, by Isaac’s not keeping the law, but *those of Abraham*. If infant-circumcision were only a seal of *parental* rights, it is plain, that it could cease to be a sign of *this* import, only by the wickedness and unfaithfulness of *the parent*. But if it were a seal of God’s promise, of everlasting good to the child, on certain conditions to be performed by the parent; it is easy to see, that, if the *child* did not obey his parents in the Lord, his circumcision would become *uncircumcision to him*. Circumcision could become uncircumcision only to those, on whom it was a seal of a *divine promise*, if it be true that *this* was its true import, as it respected either adults, or infants. But if it were a mark only of personal, or parental dedication; it might, by disobedience, become uncircumcision, either to parent, or child. If, therefore, to Abraham it were a seal of a divine promise, and not the seal of a promise of like import respecting Isaac; there were no *covenant-claims*, to be invalidated, but those of Abraham. In order, therefore, to avoid the absurdity of supposing certain covenant-promises, on God’s part, to cease to become binding, by the disobedience of the circumcised child, when *infant-circumcision* was a mark, or seal of no such promises; it must, also, be supposed that, neither was adult-circumcision any thing more than a mark, or seal of *personal engagements*. *This sentiment* appears to be fundamental to that scheme of baptism, which is advocated in the “Inquiry” before us.

But how, consistently with this, it can be said, as it is, p. 101, that “the circumcision of an infant,

"was a sign of the parent's covenant-title," is not, at present, discerned. The parent's being *active*, in administering circumcision to the child, it is true, is suggested as a reason of its being a sign of his covenant-title. But the very same consideration, viz. that man—that the parent *alone was active* in the application of the seal of circumcision, is urged, p. 74, as an evidence that it was a seal *only on the part of man*. If, therefore, the circumcision of an infant, were a sign of the parent's title to covenant- blessings; it was a sign, which, in its nature, must have been extremely insignificant; since man had no more right to *seal*, than he had to *give* such a title to himself. There is, indeed, an utter impropriety in speaking of, either circumcision or baptism, as a *sign, or seal, of any rights or titles whatever*, unless the former were heretofore, and the latter now be, God's seal of that gracious promise of his, which secures the bestowment, of all the blessings contained in the promise, on all those, on whom God directs the seal to be set. And, if this be the import of divinely instituted seals, it is very obvious, that infant-baptism is not to be considered as merely a sign of parental dedication.

Once more; it was objected that, "on the principle urged by Mr. Strong, baptism, when applied to an infant, is of a very different import from that, which it is of when applied to an adult." If it be admitted that baptism, when applied to an adult, is God's seal of his own promise of favor; it will be obvious to the reader, that nothing is said, in the reply, which, at all, abates the force of the objection. It is admitted that they must be different, *because an adult is active, but the infant not*. But to *this difference*, no reference whatever was had in the objection. The difference, to which the objection relates, is, that *adult-baptism is God's seal to his*

own gracious promise ; but infant-baptism, only the parent's seal of his own covenant-engagements. If there be this difference, respecting the import of baptism, when applied to different subjects—if in some cases it be God's seal, and in others, not ; it was incumbent on Mr. Strong to produce, from the scriptures, the evidence of it :—Or, at least, to show how *that*, which is merely *man's seal*, is afterwards converted into *God's*. If baptism, in both cases, be only man's seal, the difficulty vanishes. But if, in the case of the adult, it be God's seal ; and, in that of the infant, only man's ; there needs something further said to obviate it. In both cases it may be the seal of a divine promise, that the Lord will be a God to the subject. For it to be said, therefore, as it is, p. 97, that the ground of the objection has, really, been admitted on the other side of the question, because it is granted that no divine promise is sealed, in baptism, *to the infant*, is not any thing to the case. But we proceed to other remarks.

It was urged, in my "Inquiry," that, as the fate of the offspring was suspended by divine constitution, on the conduct of the parent, in the covenant, which God originally established with the first of our race, it would be no more than analogous to suppose, that provision is made, in the *covenant of grace*, for parents to be instrumental in transmitting and securing *its blessings*, to their offspring.

In reply to this argument from analogy, it is said, by Mr. Strong, p. 60. that "the fate of all Adam's posterity, to the remotest ages, was suspended on *one act* of disobedience." And as it is not pretended that *one act* of faith, in a parent, will secure blessings to his posterity, to the end of time ; he supposes the argument from analogy to be of no weight.

But if it be considered that the constitution, which formed a connexion between Adam and his immediate offspring, was to be, from him, transmit-

ted to future generations, and form the same connexion between every successive parent, and his offspring ; the argument from analogy, will not be without weight. Though one act of disobedience, in Adam, ascertained the fall of his whole posterity ; it ascertained it only by rendering it certain, that the next parent would be wicked ; and, consequently, transmit a wicked character to his child. Nothing appears, either in the holy scriptures, or in the reason and nature of things, to lead us to suppose, that *wicked Adam* was the blameable cause of communicating a bad moral character to *his* children, any more really than *other wicked men* are the blameable causes of communicating a similar character to *theirs*. God visits the iniquities of other parents upon their children, as really as he did, those of the first parents :—This being agreeable to the nature of the constitution, which was originally established with the first of mankind. Had this been suitably attended to, and considered, it is believed that it would not have been asserted, as it is, p. 63. that *there is no fixed and invariable constitution, that wicked men shall transmit a bad moral character to their posterity*. But, in the argument from analogy, Mr. Strong says, p. 60. that “ the comparison, instead “ of being made, between Adam and believing parents, should have been made between the first “ Adam, and Jesus Christ, the second Adam.” To this, it need only be replied, that it was.

In opposition to the sentiments, advanced, in Mr. Strong's first “ Inquiry,” it was urged that, as the disadvantages of the *fall*, are more than compensated by Christ, it would be no more than natural to suppose, that a divine constitution is now formed, whereby parents may be instrumental of saving good to their children ; as the first human pair might have been to theirs.

To this argument, and to that suggested from the fulness of Christ's propitiation, it is objected, p. 61, 62, "that they necessarily terminate in error, implying the doctrine of *universal salvation*."

On this objection it needs only be observed, that if, from Adam's possessing *advantages*, in his original state of purity, for securing, eventually, his whole posterity from sin and ruin—if, from the apostle's assertion, that where sin abounded, grace did *much more* abound—if, from Christ's being the propitiation, "not for our sins only, but also for the sins of the whole world," and from the *sufficiency of his atonement* for the recovery of all;—if, from these considerations, it will follow that *all mankind will be finally saved*; the objection is admitted to be just and unanswerable. If *these sentiments* "necessarily terminate in error;" the argument, to which the objection is made, is undoubtedly erroneous.

It is objected, also, to the doctrine, which teaches a connexion between the duty and faithfulness of parents, and the salvation of their children, that it is a sentiment, which gratifies the *selfish feelings* of men. It is asked, "which scheme puts the faith and resignation of parents to the greatest trial?—That which requires parents to give up their children *unconditionally* to God; or that, which gratifies the selfish feelings of the dedicator, so far as to contain assurances of just such an issue, as his private feelings would dictate? See, p. 109, 110.

In reply to this objection, it may be asked, is the doctrine, which teaches a connexion between the dedication of *ourselves* to God and *our own final salvation*, fitted to gratify *our selfish feelings*? Does this doctrine contain assurances, to the dedicator, of such an issue as his *private feelings* would dictate? Is *any one* authorised to expect salvation, without giving up *himself unconditionally* to God? No more does the doctrine, against which this objection was thought

to militate, suppose that any parent has a right to expect the salvation of his child, unless he make an *unconditional* dedication of him to God.

It is objected, further, that the scheme, which the author of the "Inquiry" before us opposes, "in no case requires of the parent, the painful and mortifying task, of bringing his own child, which is flesh of his flesh, and bone of his bone, and declaring, that he is an incorrigible son" &c. p. 110.

From whence this objection is collected, on what it is founded, or what was said, in my inquiry, to open a door for it; is not, at present, discerned or recollected. But whether, upon the plan of infant-baptism, which Mr. Strong has advanced, and labours to support, in each of his "Inquiries," the church have any authority to exercise any *ecclesiastical discipline* over baptized children, will admit of serious doubt. He says, p. 109, of his second inquiry, that baptized children, "through the medium of their parents, are subject to a discipline, which is peculiarly painful and trying. They are laid under a necessity of being *moral*, if parents are faithful; or, of being declared *incorrigible*, and as such given over to ruin." From this mode of expression, one would naturally be led to suppose, that children, who have been given up to God in baptism, are to be subjected to ecclesiastical discipline, in common with other members of the church. For to what greater length can a church carry its discipline, toward any of its members, than to declare them *incorrigible*, and as such give them over to ruin? But, that a church has any authority to do this respecting any one, without having taken the previous measures for his conviction and recovery, which the gospel prescribes, does not appear.

It appears, however, according to Mr. Strong, that not only the *mode* but also the *ground* of disci.

pline, respecting a baptized child, and those whom he considers as members of the church, are different. The former is to be declared incorrigible, and given over to ruin, *not because he is no christian*, but because he is *immoral*:—The latter, because he does not *obey the laws of Christ*. But where these different modes and grounds of ecclesiastical discipline are to be found in the word of God, does not yet appear. Nothing, indeed, is more obvious, than that the holy scriptures direct the christian church to exercise its discipline, and pass its censures, *only for disobedience to the laws of Christ*. For christian churches to be taught, that they are to declare any to be incorrigible, and as such to be given over to ruin, for being *immoral*, but not for being *unchristian*; must have a very unfriendly aspect upon their order and discipline.

That the morality, which Mr. Strong says baptized children are laid under a necessity to practise, is something quite different from *christianity*, it is presumed will not be denied:—Otherwise, it must be supposed that they are to be subjected to the “peculiarly painful and trying discipline,” which is to be practised upon them, *for neglect of the laws of Christ*:—And to suppose *this* to be the ground on which they are to be given over to ruin, would run immediately into the sentiment, which he so earnestly opposes.

But these are not all the difficulties which occur, on the supposition that christian churches are required to declare baptized children to be *incorrigible*, and as such to be given over to ruin, for *immorality*. Are baptized children to be subjected to “a discipline, which is peculiarly painful and trying,” for being *immoral*, while no offence is taken, either by their parents, or by the church, at their being *unchristian*? Are parents called, by the laws of Christ, to the “painful and mortifying task of bringing

“their own children, who are baptized, and declaring them to be incorrigible,” for *fornication*, for instance; but, to be patient spectators of their denying Christ before men, and living in open disobedience to the express law of Christ? Is the *former* offence so much more criminal, in the sight of Christ, than the latter, that for *this* the child is to be given over to ruin; but, not for the other? What will the child think—what will the world think, of the nature of christianity, and the discipline of Christ’s house, when they behold so mortifying a task performed, so severe a censure passed for what is called immorality; while a known and open neglect to obey and serve Christ, is borne with all patience and silence!

Will it be said that the law of Moses, Deut. xxi. 18—21, which pointed out the discipline, which was to be exercised toward a stubborn and rebellious son, authorises, both parent, and church, to exercise the severity pleaded for, for *immorality*, but not *other breaches* of the laws of Christ? Let it be remembered, that children were to *honor their father and their mother*; which the apostle explains to be *obeying their parents in the Lord*, Eph. vi. 1. And, *this*, he says, was the first commandment *with promise*. And that a divine promise should be made to mere external obedience, it is presumed will not be urged upon any other plan, than that the former dispensation was *typical*, and the *Jewish church*, but a *typical church*. And if so, no argument can be drawn from thence, in support of the opinion that the discipline of the *christian church* is ever to be exercised merely to make children *moral*.

But if such children as are properly dedicated to God, in baptism, are no more comprehended in that covenant of promise, which is the uniting bond of the church, than the children of infidels—if, according to the nature and design of the christian

institution, baptized children are not of the church's society and company; they are no more subject to the discipline of the church, than the children of unbelievers. The apostle says, 1 Cor. v. 12, 13. "For what have I to do to judge them also, that are without?—But them that are without, God judgeth."

It is insinuated, in the "Inquiry" now under consideration, that, if the doctrine of a connexion, between the faithfulness of parents and the salvation of their children, be admitted and believed, children will not consider their salvation as depending on *personal exercises*: But, on the scheme of *simple dedication*, it is said, p. 112, "Baptized children have the most solemn inducements to be attentive and teachable: For they are to consider that their salvation is depending on *personal exercises*, and not merely on the faithful exertions of parents."

Readers in general, at least the less attentive, would suppose that, according to this representation, the doctrine of a connexion, between parental faithfulness and the salvation of children, sets aside the necessity of *personal holiness* in children—that the salvation of the children of believers so entirely depends on their parents, that *no personal exercises of their own are necessary*.

An objection, of a similar nature, has often been raised against the doctrine of *divine decrees*. It is said, if *this doctrine* be true, it takes away all motive to *personal exertions*, and renders human endeavours and diligence fruitless. But the apostle, Peter, who was a strong advocate for the doctrine of *election*, was of a different opinion. Accordingly he directs *christians*, "Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your *calling and election sure*?" "For if ye do these things, ye shall never fall." 2 Peter i. 10.

If it be considered that, on the principle of a sup-

posed connexion between the faithfulness of parents and the salvation of their children, a great and material part of the parent's duty consists in urging, on his children the absolute necessity, and the infinite importance of personal holiness ; the above insinuation will appear to be groundless.

Mr. *Strong* supposes that, if the covenant, which God established with Abraham when circumcision was instituted, gave no *assurance* that its essential blessings should be transmitted, from the believing parent, to the child ; no benefit can be derived from any supposed *provision* of this kind, which was contained in it. He says, " The condition of the blessings of the covenant cannot be fulfilled, respecting infants, while in infancy ; and more than that, there is no security of a performance of those conditions." p. 12. He urges, further, that the promise in question is admitted to be *conditional*—" that the conditions are not fulfilled, at the time baptism is administered ; and that there is nothing in the covenant, which secures the fulfilment of them." p. 100. But if it be a mercy, a privilege to enjoy the offers of pardon and eternal life, even though there be no certainty that the sinner, to whom the offer is made, will comply with it ; it may be equally a privilege to have the offer, in question, contained in the covenant, which God establishes with believers. And it is admitted, p. 30, " that the covenant, which God established with Abraham, made *provision* for gracious qualifications to be transmitted from parent to child, so far as was requisite to the support of a church in his family." Not only is this admitted, but also that " the promise did contain a *security of such gracious qualifications* as were necessary to support a church, through the whole period respected in the promise," p. 31. *Some of the children of A-*

braham, and of his believing successors, even down to the coming of Christ, were not therefore, *in the same sense* left to uncovenanted mercy, as the children of *unbelievers*. The *covenant*, which was established with Abraham, secured the transmission of its blessings, at least *to a part* of his natural posterity. And, unless we can find that *this promise* distinguished some part of the natural offspring, from others; it will not be easy to see why it did not secure its blessings *to all*, upon the same conditions, upon which it secured them to *any*.

But, respecting this covenant, it is to be observed, further, that it is to *believers* that the proposals of it are made—to such as now love God supremely, and in whom the holy spirit dwells—to those, whose hearts are in a good measure prepared, by divine grace, for every duty, and formed for a compliance with every requisition of the covenant, when understood. The proposal is made to one, who has the spirit of Christ, who is supposed to be continually asking needed assistance and grace for every duty, and now entitled to the gracious promise of being heard. *That divine help and grace*, which are necessary to a performance of parental duty, are therefore within the reach of every believing parent, in a sense in which converting grace is not within the reach of the impenitent sinner. Nor is that grace, which is necessary to such parental faithfulness as God will bless to the conversion and salvation of children, an unattainable thing. Abraham, and many of his successors, it is allowed, possessed this grace: And many others have, since; and have seen and enjoyed the happy fruits of their faith and labors, in the conversion of their children. And if this be so, there is every reason to suppose, that the nature of the covenant-proposal will be no sooner understood and believed, than christians will generally embrace it: And a new spring will be given

to the exertions of pious parents, which will be followed with happy and blessed fruits in their children. And this may be especially expected, as the light, which is enjoyed under the gospel-dispensation, is far greater, and divine influences more copious, than under the former.

“ That the conditions of the covenant, in relation to infants, cannot be fulfilled, while they are yet in infancy ; and, more, that there is no security that they ever will be fulfilled,” is taking for granted more than is admitted. There is every reason to suppose that the parent, who cordially embraces the covenant, will persevere in that faithfulness, with which the covenant connects the good of his child. The holy scriptures always represent grace, as being a growing, increasing principle in the hearts of christians. “ The path of the just is as the shining light, which shineth more and more, unto the perfect day.” There is no more reason to suppose that a christian will ever lose that grace, by which he embraced the covenant with relation to *his child*, than, with relation to *himself*. And if the covenant, in this view of it, be embraced, both the future faithfulness of the parent, and the salvation of the child, are eventually secured. In this way it is that the final salvation of a *believer* is secured, upon his first acting faith.

It is said, by Mr. *Strong*, in the “ Inquiry” now before us, p. 36. “ It is evident that the Gentiles, considered collectively, are introduced into the same standing with the natural seed of Abraham : That there is now the same promise, in kind, respecting the Gentile world, as there had been respecting Abraham’s natural posterity.” And a number of passages of scripture are quoted, on this and the preceding pages, in support of the sentiment. These passages undoubtedly prove that, when the Jewish nation, as a body, were rejected

for their unbelief, the church of God was to be supplied from the Gentiles. But this is no proof that the promises, respecting *the Gentile world*, are now of the same nature and extent, as they formerly were, with respect to the natural seed of Abraham. The passages quoted from the New Testament, as Acts xiii. 46. And, Acts x. 34, 35. And, Rom. x. 12, 13, prove no more than that *believing* Gentiles are received into the same covenant-relation to God, as *believing* Jews.

That the Gentiles collectively are now regarded, by God, in his dispensations, as the Jews, Abraham's natural offspring, had been regarded in time past, is a sentiment, which has no scripture authority for its support. And if not, there will be no evidence that, as it is said, p. 38. "Abraham and his natural "seed, were a fit type of Christ and his spiritual "seed." The Gentiles, at large, are not now God's peculiar people, as the Israelites were, under the former dispensation—they are not now the covenant-people of God, as the Jews were heretofore. The whole body of the Jewish nation were, heretofore, God's covenant people, as really as the whole body of professing believers, the visible christian church, are now the covenant-people of God. We know there were many false and hypocritical professors in the Jewish church, under the former dispensation: And, so there are, among professing christians, under the present. Yet there were many pious people among the Jews; as there are many such now, in the christian churches. Until any particular christian church is rejected, and its candlestick removed out of its place, all gospel ordinances are to be administered to all its members; and, baptism to the infant-seed. In like manner, until the Jews were broken off from the true olive, all the sacred ordinances belonging to that dispensation, were equally enjoined on their whole nation

indiscriminately, and enjoyed by all ; and circumcision was to be administered to the infant-seed of all.

To suppose, therefore, that “ the Gentiles collectively,—should be regarded by God, in his dispensations, as the Jews, Abraham’s natural offspring, had been regarded, in time past ;” and that they are “ introduced into the same standing with the natural seed of Abraham,” as is asserted, p. 35, 36, would open a door for such a latitude, in the administration of gospel ordinances, as has not the least appearance of authority from the word of God. There is no foundation, therefore, it is apprehended, for representing “ Abraham and his natural seed, as a type of Christ and his spiritual seed.”

Mr. Strong, in the “ Inquiry” before us, p. 68, speaking of the “ many declarations, which appear to promise and connect the piety of children with the faithfulness of parents,” says, “ they are to be considered as many other *positive declarations* are considered—as what may be *hoped for*, and *ordinarily expected*.” But can this be a just rule for explaining the *positive declarations*, the *promises of God* ? Are we to expect no more than that things will *ordinarily* take place agreeable to the *positive declarations* of the word of God ? If they may take place differently in *one instance*, why not in *another*, and in *all* ? If *positive declarations* may fail of being accomplished *even in one instance*, the ground of confidence in the word of God is taken away.

But instances are produced to illustrate this sentiment, and to authorise such a construction of positive declarations. It is said, “ there is a declaration, which naturally implies, that children shall have *long life*, if they are obedient to parents : And that wicked men shall not *live out half their days*.” The passages here alluded to, it is ap-

prehended, are but ill chosen, for support of so loose a construction of *positive declarations*. As to the first of them, it is found, *Exod. xx. 12.* There the God of Israel says, "Honor thy father and thy mother, that thy days may be long upon the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee." The import of these words is given by Moses, *Deut. vi. 2.* "That thou mightest fear the Lord thy God, to keep all his statutes, and his commandments, which I command thee ; *thou and thy son, and thy son's son, all the days of thy life, and that thy days may be prolonged.*" If children, in Israel, honored their parents, and obeyed them in the Lord, God would *prolong to that people* the enjoyment of the promised land. And had this condition, upon which God promised them preservation in that good land, been fulfilled, they would not have been cast out. But from nothing which has ever taken place, either under the former, or the present dispensation, have we reason to believe that God has ever proposed a *long temporal life* to any one, either as a motive to virtue, or the reward of it : Nor do events warrant us even *ordinarily to expect it*. Whenever God proposes any particular blessing as a motive to virtue, he not only ordinarily, but invariably bestows it, when the condition, upon which the proposal was made, is fulfilled. The *long life*, therefore, which was proposed as a gracious reward of filial obedience, was, *of the people of Israel as a body in successive generations* ; but not a length of days to every particular obedient child.

On the other hand, there is nothing, either in the holy scriptures, or the experience of mankind, which warrants us to conclude that the lives of wicked men shall be shorter upon earth, than the lives of those who are pious, excepting in cases wherein offences are committed, which are made capital by the divine law, or where special intempe-

rance is indulged. The passages, which seem most to favor the opinion, that impenitent sinners shall die in earlier life than others, are those, Ecclef. vii. 17, and Pf. lv. 23. In the first of these it is said, "Be not overmuch wicked; neither be thou foolish: Why shouldest thou die before thy time?" In the other, "Bloody and deceitful men shall not live out half their days." But when we reflect that the wise man says, chap. ix. 1, 2. "No man knoweth either love or hatred, by all that is before him. All things come alike to all: There is one event to the righteous and to the wicked; to the good and to the clean, and to the unclean, to him that sacrificeth, and to him that sacrificeth not: As is the good, so is the sinner; and he that sweareth, as he that feareth an oath:"—When we hear the Psalmist complaining, as he does, Pf. lxxiii. of the worldly greatness and prosperity of the wicked; and holy Job expostulating, chap. xxi. 7. "Wherefore do the wicked live, become old, yea, are mighty in power?"—When, I say, we reflect on these things, and on the common course of events in every age; we shall have little reason to think, that either the wise man, or his father before him, meant to intimate that impenitent sinners are to be taken away in earlier life, than others.

The plain import of the passages can be no more than this, that *wicked people are never ready for death—the work, upon which they were sent into the world, is never done—death overtakes them before they have begun, to live, and finds them unprepared.* Such considerations as these are weighty motives, to all, to "do whatsoever their hand findeth to do, with their might; remembering that there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom in the grave whither they go."

The other instance of a promise alluded to, where the event may be no more than hoped for, and ordinarily expected, is in 1 Tim. iv. 16, where the apostle says to Timothy, "Take heed unto thyself, and unto thy doctrine; continue in them: For in doing this, thou shalt both save thyself, and them that hear thee." "In these words, Mr. Strong observes, there is a most positive declaration that, in case Timothy should take heed to himself and to his doctrine, he should save not only himself, but his hearers." He then asks, "Will any one understand them, as a covenant and promise, that if a minister is faithful to preach sound doctrine, he shall absolutely save *all* that hear him!" There is a most *positive declaration* also, that "he that believeth not shall be damned:" May it not as well be asked, will any one understand *this* as rendering it *certain* that *all* unbelievers shall be damned! Why is not the passage rather to be construed, agreeably to the prevailing charity of the day, that it may be *ordinarily expected* that they, who believe not, shall be damned? If the *positive declaration*, in one case furnish no more than a ground of *general expectation*, why does it, in the other.

If we carefully attend to the import of the term *hear*, as it is frequently used in the holy scriptures, we may have reason to conclude, that the positive declaration of the *apostle*, is no more indeterminate than that of the *Saviour*. Thus when the free and generous invitation is given, "Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money; come ye, buy and eat, yea, come, buy wine and milk without money, and without price:" It is thus explained, "*incline your ear, and come unto me: Hear, and your soul shall live.*" Isai. lv. 1, 3. So the Saviour himself says, "If thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone:

"If he shall *bear* thee, thou hast *gained thy brother*."

Matt. xviii. 15. So, if ministers preach the *true doctrine*, and men *bear* them, they will certainly be saved: While, on the other hand, if they pervert divine truth, and preach *another gospel*, and men *bear* them, and imbibe their false doctrines, they will certainly perish; and, their blind guides with them. This is the motive, solemn and weighty indeed! by which the apostle urges his son Timothy to take heed to himself, and to his doctrine.

If the import of those many declarations of scripture, "which appear to promise and connect the piety of children with faithfulness of parents," is to be learned from the passages referred to for their illustration; it will clearly appear, that the piety of children may certainly be expected, as the fruit of parental duty and faithfulness. No one will urge a greater certainty of the salvation of such children as are brought up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord, than—that filial obedience, under the former dispensation, would have prolonged the days of the people of Israel in the land, which the Lord their God had given them—that wicked men die before their time—and that they, who hear, when the true doctrines of the gospel are preached, will be saved.

When it is said that some of these declarations "have respect to the generation of godly men;" and, others intimate no more than "what may be hoped for and ordinarily expected;" it may reasonably be asked, by what rule promises, which are certain and definite, shall be distinguished from those, which are uncertain and indefinite? How shall we know when positive declarations give *assurance* that the events, concerning which they are made, *will certainly take place*; and, when these events may only be *hoped for and ordinarily expected*?

We know that a general hope and expectation of certain blessings may arise from the *common course of divine providence*. He, who faithfully tills and seeds his ground, may ordinarily expect a crop. But if the positive declarations of the word of God give no further ground of certainty in *one instance*, than arises from an ordinary course of events in the natural world, why do they in *another*? By what rule or authority shall we feel *assured* of future good in one case, while we only entertain a general hope and expectation of it, in another? Hence it may rationally be concluded, that *positive declarations of the word of God* may, with no propriety, be considered as intimating no more than *what may be hoped for and ordinarily expected*. And, that there are many *positive declarations*, which connect the salvation of children, with the duty, the piety, and the faithfulness of parents, seems to be admitted.

It is objected, further, by Mr. Strong, that the doctrine of a supposed connexion, between the faithfulness of parents and the salvation of their children, "is calculated to promote and uphold presumption—that the scheme is such, that such only as have a high conceit of their own eminent piety, would probably ever venture to practise upon it, if it were thoroughly understood." See p. 116.

Had not our author, mistaken, in some degree, the sentiment, which he means to oppose, the charge of its tending to promote and uphold *presumption*, probably would not have been exhibited against it. He takes it for granted, through his whole inquiry, that no parent has any security of perseverance in that faith, with which the salvation of his child may be connected by promise, even though he may originally dedicate and give him up in the exercise of such a faith. This is taken for granted, however, without sufficient ground. Had he not made

this mistake, it is believed he would not have said, "such as presume to enter into such engagements, must trust to their own resources and sufficiency." With respect to the observation, that people must have a high conceit of their piety, before they will venture to practise upon the scheme, which is urged in opposition to that of our author; we need only observe, that eminent degrees of piety are not wont to be attended with high pride and self-conceit. By those, who oppose the sentiment that *gracious qualifications* are necessary, as terms of admission into the visible church of Christ, it has been often objected, that it tends to lead such as are admitted on this principle, to think themselves *better than others*, and to indulge that spirit of pride and self-conceit, which says to others, "Stand by thyself; come not near to me, for I am holier than thou." But if this objection of theirs be groundless, so is that before us. If love to Christ, and a disposition to confide in him, and in his power and faithfulness, do not tend to inspire a high conceit of personal piety; it is apprehended that the scheme here referred to, if properly understood, is in no other danger of being attended with the disagreeable consequences charged upon it, than the doctrines of revelation in general are, of being abused and perverted by wicked men.

SECTION VII.

On the reasonableness of the supposed connexion, between the duty and faithfulness of parents, and the salvation of their children.

AS parents have now the same relation to their children, and interest in them, which they

had under the constitution and covenant originally established with man; it would be no more than rational to suppose, that the fate of posterity is, in some measure, suspended, on the duty and faithfulness of parents, as it was under the first covenant. The similitude, which the scriptures represent, between the first, and the second Adam, evidently leads us to expect a similar mode of divine dispensation, in many respects, toward men, under both these federal heads. The character, which the God of Israel gives of himself, when he says, *Exod. xx. 5, 6.* "For I the Lord thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me: And shewing mercy unto thousands of them that love me, and keep my commandments;" clearly suggests the idea, that the fate of children is, now, at least to some very considerable degree, suspended on the conduct of their parents. Since the interposition of *divine mercy*, the fate of posterity does not hang so entirely on the conduct of the parent, as it did under the first covenant:—If it did, there would be no hope for any of us. For though the first constitution still remains so far in force, that corruption and wickedness invariably descend, from parent to child; *mercy* may interpose, and supercede the general law, whereby the condemnation of the first transgressor was, in effect, the condemnation of the whole human race.

But if it be the usual manner of God's dealing with men, even under the dispensation of the covenant of grace, to visit the iniquity of the fathers upon their children; when he represents himself, on the other hand, as a God, who shows mercy to thousands (of generations, as it is *Deut. vii. 9.*) of them, who love him, and keep his commandments: How can we suppose less, than that he means to en-

courage the faithfulness of parents, by some assured expectation of blessings for their children? Had not the Deity entertained this gracious design, and meant to connect the good of posterity with the faith and piety of parents; it cannot be accounted for, that we so often find the seed and offspring of the righteous distinguished, in the holy scriptures, from the seed of the wicked; the former being spoken of as objects of the divine favor, and having blessings laid up for them; while nothing but evil is ever foretold respecting the offspring of the wicked—the seed of transgressors. Of the former, it is said that *they shall be established before the Lord—that they shall be delivered—that they shall be known among the Gentiles—that they are blessed, &c.* as Ps. cii. 28. Prov. xi. 21. Isa. lxi. 9. Pl. xxxvii. 25. Of the latter, it is said that *they shall never be renowned—that they shall be cut off, &c.* Isa. xiv. 20. and, Pl. xxxvii. 28, and xxi. 10.

Respecting the reasonableness of the supposed connexion, between the faithfulness of parents and the salvation of their children, we may observe the following things; viz.

1. Religion is to be kept alive, and a church to be preserved and perpetuated on the earth by the instrumentality of pious people.

God has given the utmost assurance that his church shall be preserved, and shall survive every evil—that the kingdom of Christ shall stand, when all others are destroyed—and, that the gates of hell shall never prevail against his church. All will acknowledge, that it is only through the mighty power and agency of God, that these promises can be accomplished. Yet we know that God has instituted a variety of means for the preservation of his church: And in a careful use of these means only, have christians reason to expect those divine influences to be sent down, which are essential to the preservation

of religion, and the conversion of sinners: Christians are said to be the salt of the earth—that which preserves the world from putrefaction and ruin. They are the light of the world: And from them is the light to shine, to the conviction of others. There are many passages of scripture, which clearly intimate, that it is in answer to the prayers of God's people, that his church is to be preserved and enlarged, and enjoy prosperity and peace. Thus, where God has been foretelling what he would do for his church, and how he would increase it, Ezek. xxxvi. he lets his people know, that it should be in answer to prayer, that he would do these things for them. Great things are promised to be done for the church, in answer to prayer, in a variety of places. Thus, Isa. lviii. 9, and on. So Isa. lxxv. 24. And Zach. xiii. 9. Accordingly the church is represented as a mother longing to be blessed with a numerous offspring, and grieved in spirit on account of her unfruitfulness, Isa. liv. And the most large and precious promises are made to her. Christian parents are under much greater advantage to be instrumental of saving good to their children, than to others. Parents naturally feel for their children, as for themselves: And, are sensible of a greater interest in them, than they can have in others. Children are parts of themselves, in a sense in which others are not; and the connexion between parents and children is more near and intimate, than between any others. Hence christian parents have a more strong and lively sense of the worth and value of their children's souls, than of the souls of others. And as their attention is more immediately to their children than to others, it is to be supposed that they have more constant and ardent desires for their salvation. Christian parents feel, not only that their children are parts of themselves, but that they are committed more immediately to their care. And,

from the many directions given to parents, in the holy scriptures, respecting the education of their children, and the dedication of them to God, they cannot but be sensible that the care of their souls is committed to them; and that, their souls will be, in a great measure, required at their hands. Accordingly, they are furnished with all means, and with every advantage to do them good, and form them for the service of Christ, which can be desired. They can begin with them while their minds are yet tender and most susceptible of impressions: And, having them constantly under their eye, and subject to their control, may check and restrain their vices, before they grow up into confirmed habits. Not only so, but they have greater advantage to exemplify the duties of the christian life, and recommend it to their children by their own example, than they can have in regard of others. For these reasons it would be no more than analagous to suppose, that the holy scriptures should give peculiar encouragements to the pious labors, the prayers, and the exertions of christian parents: Especially, since such abundant encouragement is given to God's people, in his holy word, to pray for the prosperity of Christ's cause, and the conversion of sinners.

3. There is nothing equal to a *divine promise*, to animate the exertions of christians in the cause and service of Christ. Thus Joshua was encouraged with promises of success. And thus every private christian is encouraged to persevere in the way of holiness, whatever may be his temptations and trials, with assurances that he shall never fall; but that God will, in due time, bruise Satan under his feet. And if there be such promises as we have supposed, to christian parents, their obvious tendency to encourage their prayers, and to animate them to diligence and faithfulness in the performance of parental duty, will not be questioned.

4. The covenant, which God entered into with Abraham, and the parental duties it required of him, and of every successive parent in future generations, was formed for preserving a church, and perpetuating religion in his family, to the latest posterity.

This covenant did not merely give assurance that a church should exist, and be preserved on earth; but that, on certain conditions to be performed by Abraham, and by successive parents, it should exist and be preserved among the natural posterity of Abraham. That the covenant with Abraham gave this assurance of the existence of a church in his family, for future generations, is fully conceded, by Mr. Strong, in the inquiry before us, see p. 30. 31. And, that the condition, upon which the preservation of this church was suspended, in the covenant, was the performance of certain parental duties, is manifest from the express command, to every parent, to circumcise his male offspring, and *this* on pain of his child's being cut off and separated from the people of God. This covenant between God and Abraham, and his posterity, was to be perpetual. God himself styles it an *everlasting covenant* between himself and Abraham, and his seed after him, in their generations. This was a family-covenant, by certain rites on God's part, and conditions on man's, transmitting both its duties, and its blessings, from parent to child, through each successive generation: Nor could it otherwise have been an *everlasting covenant between God and Abraham, and his seed after him.*

This same covenant, comprehending posterity and extending to future generations, was renewed and established with the people of Israel, on the plains of Moab, just as they were about to enter on possession of the promised land. Thus Moses says to them, "Ye stand this day all of you before the Lord your

“ God ; your captains of your tribes, your elders,
 “ and your officers, with all the men of Israel, your
 “ little ones, your wives, and thy stranger that is
 “ in thy camp, from the hewer of thy wood to the
 “ drawer of thy water : That thou shouldest enter
 “ into covenant with the Lord thy God, and into
 “ his oath, which the Lord thy God maketh with
 “ thee this day : That he may establish thee to-day
 “ for a people unto himself, and that he may be
 “ unto thee a God, as he hath said unto thee, and
 “ as he hath sworn unto thy fathers, to Abraham,
 “ to Isaac, and to Jacob.” Deut. xxix. 10—13.

This covenant was made with Israel as a people to be continued, and to live in posterity. Therefore, speaking of the evils, which should come upon them in after times, if they were disobedient, Moses says, “ all nations shall say, Wherefore hath the
 “ Lord done thus unto this land ? What meaneth
 “ the heat of this great anger ? Then shall men say,
 “ *Because they have forsaken the covenant of the Lord*
 “ *God of their fathers, which he made with them when*
 “ *he brought them forth out of the land of Egypt.*”
 Deut. xxix. 24, 25.

In the same light is this covenant spoken of, by the Psalmist, when he says, “ O ye seed of Abraham his servant, ye children of Jacob his chosen.
 “ He is the Lord our God : His judgments are in
 “ all the earth. He hath remembered his covenant
 “ forever, the word which he commanded to a thousand generations. Which covenant he made
 “ with Abraham, and his oath unto Isaac ; and
 “ confirmed the same unto Jacob for a law, and to
 “ Israel for an everlasting covenant ; saying, unto
 “ thee will I give the land of Canaan, the lot of
 “ your inheritance.” Ps. cv. 6—11. Accordingly the prophet gives it as the reason why the people of Israel were destroyed, that *they had broken the ever-*

lasting covenant. He says, Isa. xxiv. 5, 6. "The
 " earth also is defiled under the inhabitants thereof;
 " because they have transgressed the laws, changed
 " the ordinance, broken the everlasting covenant :
 " Therefore hath the curse devoured the earth, and
 " they that dwell therein are desolate : Therefore
 " the inhabitants of the earth are burned, and few
 " men left."

As this covenant was to be perpetual between God and Abraham, and his seed after him, there were appointed rites and duties to be observed and performed, by every successive parent, toward his offspring, in order to perpetuate the covenant and its blessings to posterity. Therefore God stiles infant-circumcision *his covenant*, in the flesh of the child : And no one, who was circumcised, other concomitant parental duties being performed, was to be cut off from his people. And therefore it was that such careful and strict attention was to be paid to the instruction and education of children :— The transmission of the blessings of the covenant, and the preservation of a church in the posterity of Abraham, depending, under God, on the faithful and punctual performance of parental duty. " And
 " these words," says Moses " which I command
 " thee this day, shall be in thine heart. And thou
 " shalt teach them diligently unto thy children,
 " and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thy
 " house, and when thou walkest by the way, and
 " when thou liest down, and when thou risest up." Deut. vi. 6, 7. So, also, is it said, Ps. lxxviii. 5—7.
 " For he established a testimony in Jacob, and ap-
 " pointed a law in Israel, which he commanded our
 " fathers that they should make them known to
 " their children : That the generation to come
 " might know them, even the children which
 " should be born ; who should arise and declare
 " them to their children : That they might set their

“ hope in God, and not forget the works of God,
 “ but keep his commandments.”

Here were the conditions, upon which a church was to be preserved among the posterity of Abraham; and, the blessings of a covenant-relation to God to be perpetuated, from parent to child, thro’ successive generations. And, if these conditions were faithfully and prudently performed, God graciously bound himself, by covenant, to continue to be the God of the people of Israel; and engaged that they should prolong their life in that good land, which he had given them; and that they should be a peculiar people unto himself.

5. We see no other way in which a *covenant* could give assurance of the preservation and continuance of a church among the children of Abraham, than by giving assurance that the requisite qualifications for being members of this church, should take place in his children: And if God gave assurance *by covenant* to Abraham, that converting grace should be bestowed upon his offspring, it must have been on certain conditions to be performed by Abraham.

We know that God may *predict and foretell* unconditionally the bestowment of converting grace, or of any other blessings. But this prediction, however absolute, is not of the nature of a covenant with the person to whom it is made. All *covenants* between God and man imply certain conditions on the part of man: Nor can it be that any one has authority to expect any blessing or good, by virtue of the promise of a *covenant*, without a faithful performance of the conditions upon which the promise of the covenant was made. But when God enters into a *covenant* with any one, with express conditions on the part of man, for the preservation of true religion among his children; on the condition being performed, the covenant gives as full assurance of the bestowment of converting grace upon the off-

spring, as can arise from any mere prediction or unconditional promise whatever.

If any one lease a tract of land to his neighbour and his heirs, for a term of years, on condition of a certain rent to be annually paid ; if the payment be punctually made, agreeably to the conditions on which the lease was given, the possession, by contract, descends to his son. So if the Deity engaged to Abraham, by a covenant of promise, that he would be a God to him, and to his seed after him, on certain duties and conditions to be performed by Abraham ; a compliance with these conditions, on the part of this father of the faithful, as certainly secured the possession, of this blessed inheritance, to his seed, as it did to Abraham himself. In the covenant, on which we are particularly treating, God no more promised to be a God to Abraham on condition of his walking before him and being perfect, and circumcising himself and his male-seed ; than he did, on the performance of the same condition, to be a God to his seed. And if such were, in fact, the covenant, which God made with Abraham, it certainly connected the conversion of the child with the faith and duty of the parent.

There is no way, it is apprehended, to avoid this consequence, but either,

1. To deny that the seed, spoken of in the covenant of promise, was the *natural seed*. But to deny this, would be inconsistent with admitting, that this covenant secured the existence of a church among the natural posterity of Abraham ; which is fully granted by Mr. *Strong*, as has been before noticed. Nor will it be of any avail to say, that the covenant secured the transmission of gracious qualifications from parent to child, only so far as was necessary to the bare existence of a church, in Israel. For it is exceedingly manifest that, as far as the covenant connects the conversion of the child, with the duty

and faithfulness of the parent, *in one instance*, it does it in *all*. On the same parental fidelity, on which the covenant gives assurance *to one*, that converting grace shall be bestowed on his child, it gives the like assurance *to another*. Or,

2. That Abraham's fidelity only, was the condition, upon which the covenant of promise secured the *existence of a church* in Israel. But it is not only abundantly clear, that the covenant required the same parental duty of every successive parent, which it required of Abraham himself, as the condition on which the Lord would be a God to him, and to his seed after him, in their generations; but is, also, as has been before mentioned, fully conceded in the "Inquiry" before us. Or,

3. That this promise was never transmitted, from Abraham to any one after him; and, especially, that it has never been transferred to Gentile believers. But it has been before shown that Gentile believers are received into the same gracious covenant, which the Jews rejected; and are grafted into the same stock, from which the Jews were broken off for unbelief. That the church, which now exists on earth, is really the same church of God, which existed under the former dispensation of the covenant of grace, though it be now composed of Gentiles, instead of Jews. And consequently every privilege of a promise respecting their natural seed, which belonged to the Jewish church, now belongs, in its full extent, to Gentile believers.

Had it been that circumcision was originally instituted merely as a mark of personal, or parental engagement, all that God intended by the covenant of promise with Abraham, would have been no more than this; "I will establish my covenant between me and *thee*—for an everlasting covenant; to be a God unto *thee*—and I will give unto *thee*, the land of Canaan wherein thou art a stranger.

“—*Thou shalt keep my covenant therefore—this is my covenant, which thou shalt keep, between me and thee—all thy male-children shall be circumcised.*” If the covenant contained, and circumcision sealed no promise, to Abraham, of blessings for his posterity; it, of course, contained no promise of good but to Abraham himself. And if God, in this covenant, promised no blessing to Abraham, but what was personal—if the promise did not extend the blessings of the covenant to his posterity, on condition of the performance of certain parental duties; it is clear, that *this construction* of that covenant of promise, of which circumcision was the seal, does not limit the blessings of it, to a narrower compass than what was originally designed.

Should it be said that, though this covenant of promise gave no security to Abraham, that spiritual blessings should be conferred on his child *on any condition whatever to be performed by him*, it is nevertheless allowed, that it contained a promise of *temporal good things* to be conferred on his posterity, even the possession of the land of Canaan, from generation to generation: On this it might be remarked,

1. That if the covenant, of which circumcision was a seal, contained a promise, to Abraham, of temporal blessings for his posterity; it was on condition of his circumcising his male-seed, and performing such other parental duties as were connected with dedicating his children to God by circumcision. And if this were required of *Abraham* as the condition upon which his posterity were to inherit temporal blessings; the same was required of every other parent, in their successive generations, as the condition of the same inheritance. Agreeably to this idea of the duty required by covenant, Moses frequently reminded the people of Israel, of

what great importance it was to posterity, that they should keep the commandments of the Lord, and observe his statutes and judgments.

And if this were the case, that the condition of the promise, to Abraham, of temporal blessings for his posterity, was, that every successive parent in future generations should circumcise his male-children, and perform those other parental duties, which were connected with it, it is manifest that *Abraham's* fidelity was not the simple condition upon which the promise was made.

If neither Abraham's parental faithfulness, nor that of successive parents, were the condition, upon which temporal blessings were promised, for posterity; the inheritance, which the children of Israel had, of the land of Canaan, was, of course, no more a *covenant blessing*, than the inheritance of the United States is, to the Americans. And had, both Abraham, and every successive parent, in their future generations, been ever so faithful and punctual in the performance of every parental duty required of them; there would have been no more a breach of *covenant* on God's part, had he never given them the land of Canaan; than there would have been, with the Americans, had he never given them the possession of the United States. It is true that, had the land of Canaan been promised, to Abraham, for an everlasting possession for his posterity *on no conditions whatever*, and yet never been given; there would have been a breach of *promise*. And it is equally true that, consistently with such a promise, they never could have been cast out of that good land, however regardless they had been of the duties and requisitions of any *covenant* whatever. But an unconditional promise has nothing of the nature of a covenant in it.

2. If God, by covenant, promised to give to Abraham, and to his posterity, the land of Canaan

for a possession, on condition of certain parental duties to be performed by him, and by his successors, in their several generations ; it is, then, certain that the covenant suspended blessings, for posterity, on the duty and faithfulness of parents.—Yea, it is certain that this covenant suspended blessings, for the immediate offspring, on the duty and faithfulness of every successive parent. And this no more than corresponds with the threatening, that the uncircumcised man-child, whose flesh of his foreskin was not circumcised, should be cut off from his people. It is, therefore, clear, either that the covenant with Abraham, of which circumcision was the seal, suspended temporal blessings to posterity, on the duty and faithfulness of parents ; or, that the possession of the land of Canaan was secured to the posterity of Abraham, without any conditions on their part whatever. Or,

3. Should it be said, after all, that the seed, to which the promise of the covenant had respect, was only a spiritual seed ; it will follow, either that the inheritance of the land of Canaan was not promised to any one, on any condition whatever ; or, that it was promised to Abraham's spiritual seed for an everlasting possession.

That the covenant, of which circumcision was a seal, contained a promise, of the land of Canaan for an everlasting possession, to Abraham, and to his seed after him in their generations, cannot be denied. And that it ever was, or will be given to his spiritual seed, and not the natural, will not be contended. Nothing, therefore, respecting a spiritual seed, can be urged with any degree of consistency, as an evidence that God did not promise, by covenant, to bestow that good land, for a possession, on Abraham, and on his natural posterity. And if this were contained in the promise of that covenant, which required every parent, from generation to gen-

eration, to circumcise his male-feed; it is indubitable, that the covenant under consideration suspended the good of posterity on the practice of parental duty; and that it connected, at least, the temporal good of posterity, with the duty and faithfulness of parents. We therefore observe,

4. That no good reason can be given, why the covenant of grace should suspend *temporal* blessings to posterity, on parental duty, and not *eternal*. The covenant, which connected the temporal good of posterity with parental duty, it is acknowledged, was the covenant of grace. The duty required, on the part of the parent, in order to secure the promised blessings of the covenant to posterity, was a spiritual duty. And it is as easy, every one will admit, for God, by his gracious covenant of promise, to connect the spiritual good of the child, with the holy, spiritual duty of a parent, as its temporal: And no one, it is apprehended, will think it less analogous to the nature of that holy, spiritual covenant, which God established with Abraham, and sealed with circumcision. Accordingly,

5. It is as clear and certain, that the covenant, which God established with Abraham, when circumcision was instituted, connected the spiritual, as it did the temporal good of posterity, with the duty and faithfulness of parents. God's promise was as explicit, to Abraham, that he would be the God of his seed, as that he would give them the land of Canaan for a possession. And, upon the same terms upon which the latter was promised, the former was secured. The same parental duties, which, by virtue of the covenant, would secure and perpetuate, to posterity, the inheritance of the promised land; would, also, equally secure to them a far better inheritance, even that of the Lord's being their God.

If, for the Lord to be a God to Abraham, implied in it all good ; to be a God to his posterity equally implied the same good. If it were necessary for Abraham, and for successive parents in future generations, to circumcise their male-seed, and perform such other duties as were connected with the practice of infant-circumcision, in order to secure, by covenant, this good for posterity ; the same was equally necessary, to secure to posterity the inheritance of the promised land : Nor did the faithful performance of parental duty secure, according to the tenor and promise of the covenant, the one, either more or less than it did the other.

Accordingly we find a clear and explicit prediction, *Isai. lix. 20, 21*, that the happy effects, for which provision was made in this gracious covenant, as it respected posterity, shall actually take place among the followers of Christ. Thus it is promised, “ And the Redeemer shall come to Zion, and
 “ unto them that turn from transgression in Jacob,
 “ saith the Lord. And as for me, this is my covenant with them, saith the Lord ; my spirit that
 “ is upon thee, and my words which I have put in
 “ thy mouth, shall not depart out of thy mouth,
 “ nor out of the mouth of thy seed, nor out of
 “ the mouth of thy seed’s seed, saith the Lord,
 “ from henceforth and forever.” This promise clearly implies that, when the happy time shall come, that the Jews shall be grafted into their own olive-tree, and have God’s law written in their hearts ; parents shall keep covenant with God, and faithfully perform the duties, which, the covenant requires : And, in this way be instrumental of transmitting spiritual blessings to their children. Nor can any one rationally suppose that, in this respect, the Jews will be more highly privileged than the Gentiles, or distinguished from them.

There is no way to avoid the conclusion, that God, in his covenant of promise with Abraham, connected the spiritual good of posterity with parental duty and faithfulness, but to say that the promise, which the Lord made of being a God to the seed, which was to be circumcised, implied no more than that he would bestow upon them an *earthly inheritance*. But if the promise implied no more than temporal good, *as it regarded the seed*; why did it imply any more, as it regarded *Abraham himself*? There is the same reason for limiting the promise to temporal good in one case, as in the other. If Abraham were warranted, by the promise, that the Lord would be *his God*, to expect a heavenly inheritance; he was equally warranted, by the promise, that the Lord would be *a God to his seed*, to expect that they, also, should have a heavenly inheritance.

It being once admitted that the covenant of promise, which God made with Abraham when circumcision was instituted, established a connexion between parental duty and faithfulness, and the salvation of children, as it regarded his natural posterity; it will be more readily allowed, that the covenant of grace, under the christian dispensation, establishes a similar connection, between the duty of parents and the salvation of their children. For no one will suppose, that the coming and work of Christ have been the occasion of God's narrowing his gracious covenant, or curtailing its blessings. Nor will it readily be believed that, under the fuller light of the glorious gospel, the motives to pious parents, to bring up their children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord, are less encouraging and animating, than they were under the former dispensation.

And if God's gracious covenant of promise thus form a connection, between the duty and faithfulness of parents and the salvation of their children; we here find a broad basis for the doctrine of in-

fant-baptism, and ample ground for the practice of it. In this view of the extent and grace of the covenant, no pious parent can hesitate with respect, either to the duty, or the privilege, of having his infant-seed baptized, and the name of Father, Son, and Holy Ghost called upon it. Nor can it be doubted that the benevolent heart of a parent, will joyfully and thankfully embrace such a covenant as this, whenever conviction is felt, that so infinitely kind and gracious a proposal is made in the word of God. This view of the covenant will exceedingly delight the benevolent, though not the selfish feelings of the parental heart.

This view of the covenant is every way fitted to give spring to parental exertion; and, to animate the faith and labors of pious parents, in the instruction and education of their children. In this view of the nature and import of infant-baptism, with what peculiar and lively sensations of gratitude, delight, and joy will the believing parent bring his infant child, and dedicate and give it up to God, in this sacred and gracious ordinance! Entering it into that happy family and blessed society, from which, he trusts in God, it shall never be separated!

A conviction, that the eternal salvation of one, who is so much a part of himself as a parent feels his own child to be, is to such a degree suspended on his own faith and piety, and persevering prayers and labors, is every way fitted to impress his mind with a strong sense of the weight of parental obligation; and, to make him humble, prayerful and watchful. For, nothing so enhances a sense of obligation, and so impresses on the mind the importance of duty, as a view of the greatness of the interest depending on their being faithfully and religiously discharged. For a pious and benevolent parent to view the eternal interest of his own child, as deposited with him, and the security of it so great.

ly dependent on him ; this, if any thing, will excite and stimulate exertion. And the assurance, that his faithful labors and endeavours shall be crowned with success, will serve, among other things, to make the service pleasant and delightful.

Nor will this view, of the nature and import of infant-baptism, be without its peculiar advantages to the church, whose member brings and dedicates his child to God, in this ordinance. Every instance of infant-baptism will be affecting, and impressive on the minds of the whole church : Exciting a joy in their hearts resembling that, which there is in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth. Nor is any other view of the doctrine before us, so peculiarly fitted to excite the care and watchfulness of the whole church, both over children who are baptized, and over their parents ; and, to engage them to take heed that they offend not one of these little ones.

On the other hand ; if infant-baptism be nothing more than a mark of parental engagements ; the child being left as much at uncovenanted mercy, as though it had never been dedicated to God by a believing parent ; how much more readily will the heart of the parent admit excuses, for the neglect of that parental duty and fidelity, the ideas of which, on the other side of the question, must be so clear and impressive ! The less is thought to depend on the practice of any duty whatever, with the more ease can we persuade ourselves that, though but little be done, it will nevertheless answer—though we have not been so punctual as might be desired, yet what we have done, may pass for a tolerable compliance. And, as to the church, on the plan of simple dedication, it has nothing to do with the baptized children of its own members, more than with the children of unbelievers among whom it exists.

CONCLUSION.

IF an apology may be admitted for a writer, it must be when treating on subjects, which have been but little examined, and more sparingly discussed by those, who have gone before him. Most points of doctrine, which have been the subjects of dispute, have been critically examined, and repeatedly labored, by men of first eminence both for genius and learning. But few subjects of debate, either in morals or divinity, can now be attempted, without advantage to derive assistance from the writings of others. But not so, with regard to the subject of the present dissertation. For though many have written on infant-baptism, the great object has been, either to establish, or to confute the doctrine; and to show, either that it has, or that it has not the authority of the word of God for its support.

The great design and import of baptism, particularly in its application to the infant-seed of believers, is a subject, which has been but sparingly handled, and, generally, more superficially treated. Hence a writer on this subject, has less advantage to derive assistance and help, from the thoughts and reasonings of others, than on almost any other subject in divinity. Yet it may possibly be thought, that enough has been said, in the preceding pages, to excite apprehensions in a candid public, that it is a subject of no trifling importance; but one, which demands a careful scrutiny, and the most serious and deliberate consideration. It is a subject, which immediately relates to practice; and, in which every parent must feel himself greatly interested. And though, through the natural blindness of the human heart, the progress of knowledge, in divine things, is but slow and gradual; it is hoped that, what is here offered to public view, may excite a

more general sense of the importance of the subject, and a more careful and strict attention to it. Should this be the effect, it is presumed that further light will still appear ; and the truth, relative to the present subject of debate, be more clearly seen, and better understood. And no one can believe but that it is exceedingly desirable, that christian parents should understand, as fully as may be, the principles upon which they dedicate their infant-offspring to God in baptism ; and the conditions upon which the seal of God's covenant of promise is to be set upon them. Yet this cannot be understood, any further than just apprehensions are obtained of the nature and extent of that covenant of promise, of which baptism, both adult and infant, is a divinely instituted seal.—Nor can parents act understandingly in dedicating their infant-seed to God in baptism, unless they know, in some good measure, the nature and extent of the duty required on their part, the motives by which they are to be influenced in the practice of it, the interest which depends on its being faithfully discharged, and the conditions upon which they may apply God's seal of his own gracious promise, to their children. Here are motives of sufficient weight to engage a constant general attention to the subject, until further and clearer light shall be obtained upon it.

Nor is the disadvantage already alluded to, the only one under which the writer is sensible he labors, on the side of the question, which he has ventured to espouse. He feels that he has taken the unpopular part ; and advanced a point of doctrine, which cannot make its way to the heart, but through much opposition :—Many selfish interests and lusts combining their force to oppose it.

When it is thought that the *covenant*, in which children are to be given up to God in baptism, in no measure suspends the future interest of the child,

on any conditions on the parent's part; the heart cannot be pressed with that sense of weight of parental duty, which must necessarily arise from an apprehension on the other side of the greatness of the interest depending on a faithful performance of it. A sense of obligation naturally sits uneasy upon the human mind. And obligation is always estimated, at least in a degree, by the measure of the interest, which is suspended on the discharge of it. As it is much easier to persuade ourselves, at the present day, that we do actually, in heart, give up all our worldly interest to Christ; than though we felt that our still holding the possession of it, depended on our neglecting to espouse, even in profession, the cause of Christ: So parental duty may much more easily be thought to be complied with, when it is apprehended that the covenant, in which children are to be given up to God, leaves them to perish, notwithstanding high degrees of parental faithfulness; than when it is thought that their souls will be, to so great a degree, required at their parents hands, as the sentiment advanced, in this dissertation, will necessarily imply. Nothing but the power of divine grace, and a cordial reliance on God for assistance, will encourage any parent, to take so great a weight of responsibility upon himself.

Accordingly, we often hear expressions, from parents, in excuse for the wickedness of their children, which never would escape from their lips, did they apprehend the fault to lie so much at their own door, as the construction here given of the covenant necessarily supposes. How often is it said, by parents, after lamenting the impiety of their children, "*It is not in our power to give them grace: This is a work, which God has reserved in his own hands.*" And though this be true, and the observation may be religiously made; yet, with it, may escape the

evidence, of a latent desire of the parent's heart to exculpate himself, and palliate his own conduct. And if it be natural to the parental heart, under gloomy prospects respecting children, to find a refuge under such excuses as these ; we can hardly desire a stronger proof, of the natural opposition of the human heart, to a doctrine, which would wholly deprive it of every such excuse.

And if it be evident, that there is, naturally, a greater degree of opposition, in the heart of man, to the opinion, that the salvation of the child is suspended on the duty and faithfulness of the parent ; than to that, which leaves a far less interest to depend on parental duty : Though this would be a circumstance in no measure unfriendly to the truth of the doctrine ; it would, nevertheless, render it evident, that it must be with greater difficulty, that such a sentiment can find its way to the human heart.

But the natural opposition of the parental heart, to so high a degree of responsibility for children, as the doctrine, which is here urged, necessarily supposes ; is not the only obstacle, which lies in the way of its reception. Churches will sensibly feel an interest in the case ; and on this principle, the sphere of duty enlarged, and, the weight of it increased. It has been the general sentiment of christian churches, that they were bound, by their profession and by the laws of Christ, to exercise some peculiar watch and discipline over baptized children. Accordingly, a number of attempts have been made, however languid and ineffectual, in various churches, to discharge the obligation, which was thought to lie upon them, toward their offspring. But no sooner will it be believed, that infant-baptism was never instituted as any thing more than merely a mark of parental dedication, than

churches will naturally feel themselves relieved from that troublesome task, which, on the other hypothesis, they will feel themselves pressed to perform. For if the covenant and its promise, of which infant-baptism is a seal, do not comprehend the seed with the parent—if the covenant, by which christians are united in a church state, do no more comprehend their offspring, than the offspring of unbelievers; we may despair of ministering conviction; that christian churches, either have any authority, or are under any obligation, to exercise any ecclesiastical discipline over them.

These are discouragements, under which the present dissertation invites the public attention; besides those, which naturally result from the subject's being less skilfully handled. The writer has endeavoured to express his own sentiments intelligibly; together with the reasons upon which they are founded. And, conscious that it is a subject, which demands a most serious and dispassionate consideration; he does not feel disposed to call in question the candor of the public, in the attention, which may be paid to what is here written.

Be confident that whatever be the real truth, respecting this important subject, it will, in God's own time prevail; the writer can wish the blessing of heaven to accompany what is here offered to public view, no farther than it is agreeable to the oracles of God, and may be for the glory of his great name. AMEN.

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